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THE HERO WITH THE PRIVATE PARTS



Essays by Andrew Lytle

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THE HERO WITH THE PRIVATE PARTS

ESSAYS BY ANDREW LYtle

Foreword by Allen Tate

As novelist, as critic, as a member of the Nashville-based Agrarians, as editor of the *Sewanee Review*, and as a literary scholar, Andrew Lytle is a significant figure in twentieth-century Southern literature.

The Hero with the Private Parts is the first collection of Lytle's non-fictional writing. In these essays he not only considers specific works of several important writers, but also seeks to reveal the wellsprings and workings of the creative process. "What is chiefly impressive about Mr. Lytle's critical method," one scholar has said, "is the way in which he manages to cast so much light on a particular story and the art of fiction at the same time."

One of the essays, "The Working Novelist and the Mythmaking Process," is an impressive and original account of the making and meaning of one of the author's own novels, *The Velvet Horn*. This essay, like other selections in the volume, is informed by Lytle's acute awareness of the chaotic flux of history and the present moment, out of which a work of art emerges.

An excellent manifestation of Lytle's critical credo and technique, this collection also serves as a model of critical style. Vigorous, incisive, and impeccably clear, Lytle's style is barren of jargon and is marked by the facility for clarifying in a precise, and often unusual, phrase, a complex idea or meaning.

SOUTHERN LITERARY STUDIES

Edited by
LOUIS D. RUBIN, JR.

*The
Hero
with
the
Private Parts*



Essays by Andrew Lytle

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To CHARLES TRAWICK HARRISON

*Who Cannot know How Dark the Corridor is,
because of his own light.*



Acknowledgments

I WANT TO thank the American Academy of Arts and Sciences for allowing me to reprint from their magazine *Daedalus* two essays, "The Working Novelist and the Mythmaking Process" and "Impressionism, the Ego, and the First Person." The title of this last essay has been changed to "The Hero with the Private Parts." Also to the *Southern Review* my thanks for permission to reprint "Calhoun" and "R. E. Lee." With the exception of the one on "The Open Boat," all the other essays have been published in the *Sewanee Review*. I will always remain in debt to this magazine which has for so long hospitably received my work and services.

A. L.



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Foreword

IN ANDREW LYTLE we have a writer of great versatility who works so slowly that in the thirty years since his first novel, *The Long Night*, was published, only three full-length pieces of fiction have appeared: *At the Moon's Inn* (1941), *A Name for Evil* (1947), and *The Velvet Horn* (1957)—four novels in thirty years, or one every seven and a half years. That, of course, is not quite the whole story. His first book, *Bedford Forrest and His Critter Company*, a biography, came out in 1931, and it must be linked with the novels because it gave Mr. Lytle the opportunity to study the rural life of Tennessee in its development from frontier to plantation; and the society of Middle Tennessee from the end of the eighteenth century to its destruction in the Civil War has given him the enveloping action of all his fiction. Here was a once rooted society uprooted but still living, if not on the land yet near it, and conscious of its past, as only societies that have been dislocated by war and defeat can be. His problem as a

novelist has been to discover in his native *milieu* typical actions (he calls them mythical or archetypal) that permit him to write, not historical novels but novels as history. *Gone With the Wind* is an historical novel; Caroline Gordon's *None Shall Look Back*, Katherine Anne Porter's *The Old Order*, and Andrew Lytle's *The Velvet Horn* are fiction as history. This use of history as the source or matrix of typical actions is not unlike the "history" floating in the background of *Oedipus Rex* and *Oedipus at Colonus*. The action takes shape out of a vast and turbulent cloud of events, as the funnel of a tornado suddenly forms and descends.

The essays of Andrew Lytle are not like any other literary criticism of our time. He is a professional novelist, but he is not a professional critic. The late R. P. Blackmur years ago defined criticism as the "passionate discourse of an amateur," a kind of discourse which even the exclusively critical writer can never make into an exact science. By "amateur" I take Blackmur to have meant the man *devoted* to the object of his attention—literature, in this case—the man whose developing awareness and possession of the imaginative object becomes in the end self-knowledge. The practicing novelist who sets forth this awareness of his own art has something to say about the art of the novel that even the best professional critics cannot know. Flaubert's letters to George Sand give us fragmentary insights into his search for the precise method necessary to the writing of *Madame Bovary*; yet Flaubert never had time to make a formal attack, in formal essays, upon his central problem, which is the problem that engages every novelist: what techniques will first reveal the subject and then render it most fully? When the novelist tries to tell us *how* he did something he may succeed more fully than his critic in telling us *what* he did; we observe him at his unavoidable task of trial-and-error in developing a technique, or a combination of techniques, that will dissipate the luminous blur of his inchoate subject and bring it into focus.

Lytle's passionate discourse as an amateur is, first, before it gets on the page, a way of talking to himself about what he has found in other novelists who have been useful to him; but once he starts writing out what he has found useful he begins to impart it to the general reader who is standing over his shoulder. But I am not sure that he ever has, in his essays, the general reader before

him as a person to whom he feels responsible; and this is as it should be. The kind of high programmatic criticism that we find in these essays is "creative" (if I may use an obsolescent word) in a formal sense similar to that which we find in his best fiction, notably *The Velvet Horn* and *A Name for Evil*. For reading is translation. The essays are close translations of works which Lytle has read, reread, read once again, so that his last reading assumes so complete a mastery of the text that he no longer needs to refer to it. This sentence is his modest declaration of purpose for his critical writing: "It is part of the author's discipline to read well, and to read well you must write it down." The deceptive simplicity of this statement need not mislead us into supposing that writing it down means making casual notes for his own future use. Writing it down here means a formal effort of the imagination which places the writer inside the consciousness of Stephen Crane, Flaubert, Faulkner, Tolstoy; and, in the case of his *The Velvet Horn*, the "post of observation" that he himself after wandering in his *selva oscura* at last knew was the right stance for the work in hand. I cannot think of another record of a novelist's ordeal in the discovery of his technique in the subject which so convincingly reveals the creative process; and it might be more precise to say that "The Working Novelist and the Myth-Making Process" shows us how long meditation on the subject makes it possible for the subject to reveal to the novelist the right techniques for his particular purpose. For Lytle knows better than any writer today that there are no abstract techniques that can be taken down from the shelf, or provided by a computer, and superimposed upon the materials of fiction.

A comparison of Lytle's essays with the *Prefaces* of Henry James will reveal more similarities than differences. The essays and the *Prefaces* are examples of a critical *genre* that Poe invented in "The Philosophy of Composition." The *genre* even after a hundred years has not been given a name which would distinguish it from the various kinds of historical criticism, or of formal criticism, although it has aims in common with both the historical and the formal critical imaginations. The novelist writing about how he wrote is an historian: he tries to reproduce the conditions under which he wrote his novel—conditions which extend from the desk where he is writing out into the vast *mythos* of the social

milieu of which the finished novel that he is reflecting upon is the formal concentration. When he begins to consider how the formal concentration became possible, he moves into formal criticism. The most brilliant example of this formalistic-historical criticism that I know is Lytle's "The Working Novelist and the Myth-Making Process," an essay from which contemporary novelists may learn a good deal more than James offers them in the *Prefaces*. This is not to say that the *Prefaces* have ceased to have value for us, or that they are not still the greatest criticism of fiction ever written. When James tells us *how* he wrote *The Ambassadors*, his problem was simpler than that of the novelist of the mid-twentieth century. He knew in advance what his enveloping action had to be: the Newsome-Pocock *ethos* in collision with, to them, the mysterious rituals of a society represented by Madame de Vionnet. James's social *milieu* was given, whereas the novelist today must discover his, in that dual process which imposes upon him the ordeal of finding his techniques in the subject. But James had only to locate his post of observation—a task sufficiently difficult—in order to dramatize the values in the conflict of the two cultures.

To the modern novelist the *milieu* is not given; he must discover it, in so far as it will stand still long enough for him to discern in it a form. The advantage enjoyed by Southern novelists since the First World War has consisted in their sense of a vanishing society about to be replaced by a new order the lineaments of which remain indistinct. What the old society was, before it began to disappear, is disputable. The "legend" of the South, like the immense *praxis* of the legend of Oedipus, was there for writers of genius to reduce to a great variety of forms: Faulkner, Porter, Gordon, Young, Warren, and Lytle, all began with the legend, in varying degrees of awareness of it, for it was the given thing to which there was no alternative. Eudora Welty, a writer who seems to have little or no awareness of the Southern legend, is nevertheless looking away from it; for the "heroine" of "Why I Live at the P. O." is a displaced person who has never been away from home and who suffers from lack of her proper place in a society that no longer places people. (This is the plight of the numerous eccentrics of Southern fiction.)

Andrew Lytle's acute sense of the inchoate flux of history out

of which the fictional work of art emerges has enabled him to write the most illuminating essays that I have read on *Madame Bovary*, "The Open Boat," and *War and Peace*. This last essay, "The Image as Guide to Meaning in the Historical Novel," successfully refutes Percy Lubbock's view that *War and Peace* is two novels; for he demonstrates the organic relation of the Russian society of that age to the irruption of war, whereas Lubbock saw the novel as unrelated alternations of battles and domestic scenes. Lytle's three essays on William Faulkner are the most searching examination of this writer that we have had; they will have to be reckoned with by all future critics; for Lytle not only reads the novels, he knows what the novels are written about, what Faulkner's problem was when he confronted his huge enveloping action and set about isolating its typical features. Lytle's commentary on Hemingway, "A Moveable Feast: The Going to and Fro," gives us an entirely new insight into Hemingway's limitations. The malice towards his contemporaries back in the twenties Lytle sees as a result of his isolation as a Displaced Person who must hate because he lacks the security of place that would permit him to love.

It may be said in summary that Andrew Lytle brings to the analysis of works by other writers the same insight that enables him to write about his own. He writes about *Madame Bovary* as if he had written Flaubert's masterpiece. This criticism is entirely original: Lytle is not interested in what the professional critics have written about Tolstoy, Flaubert, and Faulkner; it is not a proliferation of other criticism. And it is universal criticism that takes its stance in a particular place at a particular time.

ALLEN TATE



Preface

IN THE END either fiction or the discussion of fiction will be no clearer than its formal presentation. Certainly the author cannot follow what he has written and complain that it really means not what the reader gets but thus and so. I suppose I've known this from the beginning, as I've known that it is dangerous for a writer to do much writing about others who write. It is so much easier to try to interpret something finished and done than it is to do it yourself. The discipline of a craft is always imperilled, when it is being practiced by a lesser use of the mind. Any writer worth his salt finds himself involved with these strictly moral questions of temptation and decision. Perhaps it is a necessary temptation to stiffen his moral nature, which is always considerably strained as a piece of work draws well into the middle, or even at the beginning when the author is unsure of its life. I've sometimes wondered if those scholars, who try to reconstruct the times and circumstances surrounding a poet instead of the intricacies of the

mind which would reveal the work, do not instinctively feel they are approaching a mystery their line cannot plumb. Else, having reconstructed the times, they would have to explain why all men are not poets or astronomers. Those who by historicism feel they have exposed as well as explained the imagination (and hence can patronize it) are too many, but in the end are harmless.

I have tried to do only what I consider my proper work, which is fiction. However reading is one way to learn to write. In this strict sense it is a part of an author's discipline to read well, and to read well you must write it down. It is the only way to explore and develop the first glimmer of meaning which by refraction flashes out of the abyss, that matrix of all knowledge. Words beget words and the meaning is there: even in this secondary sense which Lubbock places next in importance to the act itself. And rightly so.

All the pieces in this collection have been printed, except "The Open Boat." I had never considered collecting anything until Mr. Louis Rubin, Jr., suggested it for his series; I wasn't even sure I had enough to make a small book. I found things I had forgotten I had written, such as the Calhoun piece, which was done about thirty years ago and seems, on rereading, as relevant today as it was then, not for what I had to say in itself but because Calhoun's principles and defeat are relevant. Finding these pieces again, although I didn't quite feel like killing the fatted calf, I was glad to see them and am grateful to Mr. Rubin for his interest. It is well to follow your trail, for too often, even if you remember the occasion, you forget the substance of your response. And so Mr. Rubin must bear the responsibility for the collection here, either for good or ill; but I feel I can say and without shame that I am willing to share it with him.

ANDREW LYTLE

The Hero with the Private Parts



The Image as Guide to Meaning in the Historical Novel

I SHOULD LIKE to talk a little about the novel whose subject lies in the past. I must say right off that I am distinguishing fiction as an art from the mere story-telling habit and need, which is universal and continuous and of itself may or may not have form, except of course in the most rudimentary way. But certainly to be an art it must be formally conceived and delivered. To comprehend the shape and qualities of such a work it is necessary to read it for the totality of its meaning, an undertaking more often promised than done. Such reading at once brings us up against the larger matter of terminology. Percy Lubbock regrets the novel did not appear a hundred years earlier, so that it could have fallen into the hands of the schoolmen of the seventeenth century who, he feels, would have given it a proper nomenclature. At any rate the lack of some commonly accepted set of terms has got both the writer and the critical reader into talking at cross purposes, and, even with the best of instruments, into reading badly.

For example, how often do we find a novel discussed and indeed read in terms of the social sciences. If we are going to apply one area of knowledge as the means of rendering the meaning of another, we are bound to compound confusion. The very shape of tools is defined by the work they do. No cabinet-maker in his right mind would pick up a foot-adze to shape the inlay of a table top; and yet how often and with what facility is it said that Dostoevsky is a psychological novelist. Naturally the writer confronts the psyche of his personalities, but so does the cabinet-maker his wood. And whose psychology, Freud's, Adler's, Jung's; or the Chicago school's? There is less confusion in this matter at least upon Jung's part. In *Psychology and Literature* he warns us that there is "a fundamental difference of approach between the psychologist's examination of a literary work and that of the literary critic." What is of decisive importance for one may be irrelevant to the other, and he adds, "Literary products of highly dubious merit are often of the greatest interest to the psychologist." (Rider Haggard and Benoit.)

But I think the case is clearest in the so-called sociological novel. This area of study, at least in its public expression, commits in a secular way the Puritan heresy. It puts evil in the object. If we keep changing plan for plan, it seems to say, we will finally happen upon one which will solve all of man's maladjustments. What a curious inversion of Platonism, or anarchic Platonism, for the ideal image is never present, only a vague feeling for the ideal, which practically never lets the right hand know what the left is doing. I can't help thinking of King Lear. Just what plan would have made Goneril and Regan proper daughters? Certainly the king's didn't. Anyway, such a conception, put to the uses of fiction, directs the emphasis of meaning not upon the action but upon the residual implication of the action. It deprives the author of the very center of his concern, the humanity of his actors. If evil lies outside mankind, man can only be good or neutral. In either case no action is possible. At the best you get a poor kind of allegory, at its usual worst, propaganda.

This brings me to my particular enquiry, the novelist's use of a field where he has rights along with another social scientist, the historian—and not only that, but where he must use certain

methods of investigation which the historian himself uses. (I would like to add that it seems to me highly arbitrary to place the historian among the social scientists.) The entanglement here seems harder to unravel, for criticism has come to accept a joint authority over the same area: that is, literary criticism has. Witness the term, historical novel, everywhere accepted by writer, publisher, critic, as a special kind of fiction. The term has bothered me for some time. It makes an ambiguous specification which more often than not obscures the proper reading of a book. It implies that if the book is not all it ought to be as fiction, the reader can fall back upon its history. But can he? Does history exist in a vacuum, apart from the actors who make it? And obversely, where the *history* is doubtful, can you say the fiction is good? How can you separate it? And how often does criticism pass over blocks of history in a book, lumps of yeast which have not worked the dough, or public figures so briefly and, at the same time, so obviously public; or moving over the scene stiffly like papier-maché figures, or poorly disguised in some quasi-mythological dress. Andrew Jackson—must he speak with flamboyant illiteracy because he gave his name to a certain kind of democracy? Or Lincoln, the poor young lawyer who joined the Whig, the rich man's party, the lover who left his affianced at the pulpit—how does this behavior modify that compassionate heart which died that J. Gould and the freedmen might thrive with equal opportunity? Old Hickory and the Great Martyr may belong to the mythologizing instincts of a people but not to a work of art. They will not stand up there, for they lack what Andrew Jackson and Abraham Lincoln had in life, and that is humanity. And this is the first concern of the novelist. If his people lack this, no matter what he achieves, he fails in fiction.

This very illusion of life defines the difference between history as science and history as fiction. For this reason the well-wrought novel is the only way of recovering the illusion of past time. I say illusion because finally, I think, we must leave the truth to God. The question then to ask is not: Is the story historically sound? but: Does the action represent the behavior of men in this given situation (which must include the author's imagination)? Does it show what really happened, not the report of what seemed to happen? And secondly, does the form make

the most of the subject; is the subject all used up in the form (paraphrasing Lubbock)? The critical reader asks literary questions, which are the only questions he can ask about a literary form. His answer will automatically determine whether the history is sound.

Action can only take place by means of the institutional restraints of society. It is just here that the novelist and the historian are closest together. They both must do the research necessary to recover manners and customs, codes, public and private disciplines, all those habits and rituals which make up a pattern of culture. But the novelist must go further than the historian. He is not in search of principles and causes but of people. He must become the research; like Alice, he must walk through the looking glass of time and be there, where strange manners are no longer strange but familiar, at least acceptable. He metamorphoses the pastness of the past into the moving present. The reader becomes the witness. He is there; he sees; he tastes; he smells—if the author succeeds. This involves all the technical knowledge and vision which goes into the making of any good novel; but when the fiction assumes the past, it places an extra burden upon the artist. And this pressure makes another value which raises the sense of contemporaneity to a higher power: you have not only the illusion of the present, but the past permeates the immediacy of this illusion; the fictive personalities take on a certain clairvoyance; the action a double meaning, as if the actors while performing disclose the essential meaning of their time, even of all time. (This is possible.) This is literary irony at a high level, an irony that restores vitality to tradition—the past is not dead but alive; the contemporary scene then seems merely one division of an accumulation of the segments of time, wherein live people act out their private destinies in the context of a common destiny which is their history. This paradox of a past which is the present is the peculiar possibility of fiction whose subject lies in some definite period of history.

If the recovery of the total experience of a book is the critical reader's task, what I am saying, I suppose, is that the novel must be judged and accepted on its own terms, and that any specification not literary distorts and falsifies it, extracts from it a half-truth or another kind of meaning. Now I come to the real

difficulty: what are those terms? I have quoted Lubbock wishing for an anachronism: those schoolmen of the seventeenth century. I will have to confess that the situation, to use a military euphemism, is rather fluid. James and Flaubert made great sense in an effort to clarify this terminology, which certainly is the reasonable place to begin. And Lubbock, interpreting James, adds fresh terms and a re-tooling of terms taken over from the material arts. His essential position is this: the artist creates; the critic becomes an artist by recreating as nearly as he may what the artist has done. The critic must proceed in a workmanlike way. The artist is a craftsman; the critic cannot be less. In pursuit of this method I began to ask myself what device there might be which was crucial to the development of the fable. In novels which are dramatic, which render the direct impression of life, this device seems to me to be a central image, which might also be a dominating symbol, placed at the post of observation and at the center of the author's seeing eye. It was right to begin here, because it is here the author began. This image will not take the final measure of a book, but once it is located there will be less risk of misreading, for there will be a common referent. The risk remains, since finally the creative act cannot be described, even by the creator himself. To embody in words, formally, some intensity of vision affirms a mystery. It is a mystery anyhow, but more of one because a concrete method acts upon the intangible, invisible content of the mind to effect this embodiment.

Now you will not find a controlling image in the memoir type of novel; nor in the narrative which reports the complication. Such works always give it to you second-hand. The reader is never the witness. There is, to paraphrase Lubbock again, always someone standing between him and the action, talking about it. He may talk very well and hold you to the end, as does Thackeray; but it is a lesser art, because a report is never so dramatic as the action itself. Mark Twain's *Joan of Arc* is a specimen of the failure of this kind of novel. There is not a scene in it; not even the trial or the burning. Everything, even the battles, is second-hand. If any subject ever cried out for a controlling image, it is the story of the adolescent girl who saved France and undid the results of the hundred years' war. It is ready made. Through a Virgin, God gave the world its Savior,

and the world crucified Him. Through His angels another virgin saved France, and France let France's enemies burn her. Here is the oldest subject of western civilization—betrayal, open to individual and universal complementary action. Twain muffed it. His narrator is a follower, in afteryears remembering the sequence of events, all with the blurred edge of hero-worship and nostalgia. I do not believe it is the way old soldiers remember. They forget the sequence of events; they remember the sharp image. Even Twain's humor fails him. He either would not or could not confront his material. The image was there for him, but so was sentimentality and special pleading.

But I want to take a book that succeeds, not one which has failed. It is a book with a great historic scene, one recognized to be brilliant, one continuously read, and a book whose direction shows the hand of a master. This might be *Kristin Lavransdatter*, but it is *War and Peace*, because the feeling in certain quarters is that Tolstoy presents a mountain of material which he never actually reduced to its proper form. Lubbock feels that "War and Peace is like an Iliad, the story of certain men, and an Aeneid, the story of a nation, compressed into one book by a man who never so much as noticed that he was Homer and Virgil by turns." He contends that the subject is youth and age, the revolution of life marked by the rising and sinking of a certain generation. It was with this cycle that Tolstoy began, only to let himself be diverted by the drama of Napoleon and Kutuzov, Europe against the Imperial destiny of Russia. Out of this confusion, he says, Tolstoy allows himself, before the turning point of the book is reached, to assume a change of attitude and method. Nicholas, the delightful boy of all time, and Natasha, the delightful girl, become simply the hero and heroine of a particular story. That rendering of the spirit of youth, with which the book began, is therefore diminished, this loss being reflected in the lack of the large humane irony so evident in the tone of the book at the start but which does not persist through all its phases.

In spite of Lubbock's brilliant critical intuition and clarity of judgment he falls short here of his own precept: that of being fully recreative. A glimmer of doubt crosses his mind, for he asks: Has Tolstoy "intentionally coupled his two themes?" that is, "to set the unchanging story of life against the momentary tumult,

which makes such a stir in the history-books, but which passes, leaving the other story still unrolling forever. Perhaps he did; but I am looking [he says] only at his book, and I can see no hint of it in the length and breadth of the novel as it stands; I can discover no angle at which the two stories will appear to unite and merge in a single impression. [What about Prince Andrew wounded, under the blue sky?] Neither is subordinate to the other, and there is nothing above them [what more *could* there be?] to which they are both related."

There may be nothing above the action, but there is certainly something below it, at the post of observation where it should be; and this something is the controlling image. The technical procedure of looking for some such image would have saved him a blurring of the eyes in his search for meaning and that old mischance of putting our partial impression as the author's whole . . . in this instance "the unchanging story of life against the momentary tumult." The Image denies that there are two stories, one of war and one of peace. War and peace are the extremes of action, the discord which is the source of life, the means by which the totality of man's experience may be rendered. Peace is no more the unchanging story of life than is war. Both, the memory of man going not to the contrary, roll along forever in timely alternations, and who is to say that peace does not have its momentary tumults, too?

No, it is one story, if a story of the scope of life itself. Only one other story, *Kristin Lavransdatter*, allows the reader to experience so fully the variety and complexities of private and public action, from the largest panorama to the small but sharply done scene; from an incident so clear, illuminating some moment of truth, to the military campaigns and battles involving hundreds of thousands of men and the destinies of races and peoples, focused upon the curve of the distant view or close up as the experience of one man. Whether it is a young girl at her first ball or a mother who will suffer any humiliation for the well-being of her son, it is all there. It is Russian, but it is life anywhere, any time. No one person, then, could carry the burden of meaning. Only the recurring image can contain it.

At first this image to focus the double vision (sight into the world and insight into self) might seem to lie within Tolstoy's

historical argument about the man of destiny and the forces he thinks he controls. But this won't hold up; it leaves out too much. And technically it is anterior to the writing of the book, a part of the scaffolding the author did not remove. It is part of the feeling out of which the book was written. It is the feeling in so far as it can express itself by argument, which is hostile to artistic procedure. It has marred his treatment of Napoleon and his marshalls. At times they seem allegorical figures; at times caricatures. As representatives of his theory too often their humanity is excluded, a humanity his Russian characters and certain individual French soldiers always have. When he thinks of the people as forces which desecrate Russia, he cannot objectify his feeling, to place it outside himself. It is a failure of artistic discipline. Tolstoy the Russian, not Tolstoy the artist, is speaking in this instance. These essays in a book of fiction are, therefore, a flaw. The author has withdrawn from his post of observation to argue. But when he is at the post, this feeling, purified of all that is extraneous to art, becomes the Image, at once the essence of the subject and its form. This Image I take to be somewhere in the dramatic plight, the dichotomy, in which Russia found herself after the arbitrary Europeanization by Peter the Great.

Such is a hypothesis got from a conscious search for the Image, and it must be examined against the detail of the action which ought finally to reveal the author's vision. You can begin almost anywhere: for example, in the two distinct sets of characters which the author opposes in the conflict. There is the worldly set which revolves about the Court, whose habits are predominantly European. Petersburg, that capital representing the artificial synthesis of culture, is this set's actual and symbolic habitation. On the other side you have those others, the Rostovs, the peasants, all who look to Moscow, the holy city, as their spiritual and physical center. This division extends to the armies: Napoleon and Kutuzov, of course; but in the army itself the split is distinct. There are the Russian generals like Bagration who dies on the left at Borodino and the foreign generals, particularly the Germans, whose interest is not Russia but their professional ambitions. These abstract theorists seem almost abstractions themselves beside the failing, battered, too-ready-to-weep but how human Kutuzov, who goes to sleep in staff meetings and at

moments of crisis listens not to the messenger's words but studies his face, and there reads the true condition of affairs. It is to this old Russian, against the wishes of the Czar and the Court, that the people commit the defense of Russia when Napoleon actually invades the holy soil, when the war, in effect, ceases to be a matter of European politics and becomes a matter of Russian life or death. Kutuzov has the two qualities which the protagonists risk in the action: humanity with its frailties and strength; but more important, that mystical communion with the soul and body of Holy Russia, which is every compatriot's inheritance. When Kutuzov takes command, he mentions no strategic theory. He says, "They'll eat horse flesh yet." And because he instinctively knows that the real issue is the Russian inheritance, which he never loses sight of, even when Moscow is abandoned, his policy symbolizes the triumph of the true over the spurious. When the last foreign soldier goes away, his function is served and he quickly dies.

The Czar Alexander personifies this division. In his handsome, youthful person reviewing the army he is the presence of Russia, the little father, whom the soldiers, and especially Nicholas Rostov, spontaneously recognize as such and instantly love. But he is also the monarch, imbued with the liberal ideas of the French Revolution, the defender of Europe against its common enemy. In this role it is implied that he wastes the blood and treasure of Russia to no purpose, at least to no Russian purpose. When he makes peace at Tilsit, the fraternizing between Russian and French officers seems to Nicholas, through whose eyes the scene is witnessed, not only a betrayal of the Russian dead but unnatural in the literal meaning of that word.

The subject, then, seems to lie in the conflict which these two kinds of people represent and personify. The thing at stake is the Russian inheritance. Externally it is threatened by foreign ideas and a foreign army. Internally, by a cultural schism, still by foreign ideas which intrude upon the patriarchal and oriental relationship between rulers and the ruled, but more particularly, in the case of individuals, between the soul and worldly temptation. In body and spirit it is a question of salvation. In war and peace, in public and private affairs, in the rise and fall of families, the antagonists and protagonists meet always in the terms of this

dramatic involvement. The burden of this action is specifically carried by two families, the Rostovs and the Bolkonskies; but if you should try to find one individual who more nearly represented the intention, the structure hidden in the "abyss of the nucleus," this person would be Pierre Bezuhov.

He enters the fashionable drawing room of Anna Pavlovna and the central complication is under way, in the very first pages of the book. Beneath the glittering and well-groomed surface of this Petersburg drawing room, Tolstoy lets you understand, is played a cynical and brutal game of self-interest. In Anna's salon fashion governs. Its maneuvers are always tactical. There are sudden advances and retreats, always brilliantly executed, which must follow the shifts of politics and worldly interest. Anna manages her entourage like a good general, never allowing any genuine belief or emotion to intrude, for such belief would disarrange the artificial conventions which are able to control reality, keep it at a distance, only so long as the surface becomes the limits of action. With the instincts of a good general she views the entrance of Pierre with alarm, "as something too big and out of place." It is just that Russia is too big and out of place for her house. Pierre has already been compared to a bear, but a bear lumbering and hampered. He is massively built, but he wears glasses. Since he has just returned from a long foreign residence and education, does this suggest a vision impaired? Certainly he embarrasses his hostess by naively speaking out his true beliefs.

Tolstoy, as if he were afraid you would miss his intention, soon after brings Pierre into the Rostov household. This is in Mosow and in every way is the direct antithesis of what has gone on in Petersburg. The entertainment is not for some celebrity of the moment; it is the traditional nameday of the mother and daughter Rostov. Here Pierre is accepted as a person, lovable but eccentric, interesting for his prospects. He is accepted as a human being, in a given society, in terms of his position in that society. It even has the exact opposite of Anna Pavlovna in Marya Dmitrievna. She is old-fashioned, guarding the inherited mores with her free tongue, always speaking her mind, always genuine, with a good heart beneath the brusque exterior. It is not necessary to list the characteristics of her opposite in Petersburg, but time and again, with a too-obvious comparison, Tolstoy makes his point. Behind

the formalities (not the formalism of Petersburg) of the nameday occasion one sees the true purpose of any society that has a history. Its people come and go, are together because they want to be together, or because families must attend to family interest and pleasures. And here the entertainment is guided not by fashion but by manners, the institutional means of intercourse, maintained by the individual and family discipline and code which may outlast the individual but not the family.

These two households are brought before the reader early in the book because, as well as his larger intention, Tolstoy specifically needs to prepare the right kind of *mise-en-scène* for the two wives which Pierre takes unto himself. The one from Petersburg is the false wife; the one from Moscow is the true wife. So it is that his sincerity sets him apart in Anna's salon; but his ideas, blurring his vision, set him apart at this date from Russia. But Tolstoy has set him apart even more radically. He has made him a bastard of a great house, that is, the blood denied its inheritance by no act of its own. To intensify this isolation he is given a foreign name: Monsieur Pierre. His story is the conflict which arises out of his search for this inheritance. It takes place at two levels, the worldly level and in his own soul. In his fortunes the subject central to the book is made literal and specific.

Each level has its internal complication, conflict, and resolution; but the action of each never discloses itself separately, as Lubbock infers. The growth of the novel's structure is organic, in its two main aspects and in the aspects of all its parts. The different stages, to be specific, of Pierre's search for the matter which will embody his spirit appear first as complications in his external fortunes; and, as they appear there, they also affect the private fortunes of individuals and families, and these the larger cultural issues Petersburg and Moscow stand for.

Pierre recovers his temporal inheritance first, an inheritance so immense it seems almost Russia itself; but as far as the action is concerned, he is entirely neutral. He is in no way, except as a pawn moved about, involved. He is not even aware that the conflict of one of the richest episodes concerns him. The protagonist here is a minor character, a woman well-born but penniless, and certainly powerless in the counters used by the world. But she has one thing, passionate and selfless devotion to

her son. Hoping to gain a moiety of the inheritance for him, she frustrates the worldly power of Prince Vassily, who brings to bear all his talents and prestige to steal the inheritance from Pierre. The woman's triumph is the triumph of the human and the devoted; and the world, in spite of its power, its vast pretensions and its cunning, loses.

The episode in another way concentrates the meaning into symbol. The dying prince, Catherine's favorite and grandee, stands for an older order just as Catherine stands for a Russia unimpaired by newfangledness. She who used old Poniatowsky's throne for a toilet seat had little in common with the liberalism of Alexander. The relationship of this prince to this queen does more than suggest the personification of the masculine counterpart to Russia, for Holy Russia is Mother Russia; and that means essentially the mystical union between man and woman, forests and plain—the mythologem of mother earth out of which life comes, sucking all things but above all the peasantry, its natural children, inarticulate, brutal, instinctive, irrational as the force of life is irrational. Even dying, the old Prince suggests the control of this power, with his almost metaphysical beauty, his leonine head and a strength even in his helpless condition which makes all those around him seem small and ineffectual.

But he is also a symbol of a greater symbol. Remote in his inner chamber, there is a space around him and an air, and it is not of this world. The scurrying, the confusion which is everywhere about, moves withdrawn from the ominous quiet of his invisible presence (he is seen only at the end of the scene)—for he is also death. And this is the reality which tells out the world's vanity in a larger action, and in so doing intensifies the more specific action of the novel. It is there to warn that there is a counterpart to life which Lubbock feels Tolstoy meant the book to be about, in spite of the title and all the evidence to the contrary. Technically, as scene, it prepares for and works through all the other incidents which have to do with the two great realities, particularly when Prince Andrew, wounded almost to death, under the expanse of the sky, looks up at Napoleon, his former idol, and understands the nothingness of power and worldly vanity. And coming after the frivolous persiflage of the

young princess' words about her husband going off to get himself killed, it points towards the consequences of such frivolity.

Pierre's legal inheritance is only the outward form. Within he is still bewildered. The spiritual bar sinister, disassociating the moral and natural parts of his being, remains a barrier between himself and a true expression of his being. His story now becomes the search for that which will express the innocence and integrity of his being. Because he lacks this, he aimlessly drifts, wasting his strength, his good nature, his amiability, his great gifts of feeling, enchanted by carnal appetites, the very food Petersburg eats. Everybody loots his inheritance. He cannot say no; his good nature sees need everywhere; but it is because he feels the shame of his position that he cannot act. Prince Vassily, thwarted in his effort to steal the legal inheritance, is able to get it by marrying him to his daughter Hélène. She appeals to Pierre's lust, to that which makes the bastard; and he knows it, knows he is being tricked, but can do nothing. Marriage, as a sacrament, subduing the natural man to a spiritual end, and as an institution, bringing children into being and so perpetuating the family, the true unit of society, is absent here. This absence indicates that Pierre, in spite of his legal possession, is still lost on the left. And by implication Petersburg, in its view of marriage, wears the bar sinister.

His wife cuckolds him; half-heartedly he fights a duel, feeling that he is the true offender; separates from his wife and gives her the largest share of his income. This is the period of enchantment by illusory images. Still in search of himself, he next turns to the fraternity of Masons for salvation. But when he tries to put into practice its preachments by improving the condition of his peasants, he falls into that easy, corrupting illusion of achievement all reformers know, who think to do a thing without experiencing the pain and sorrow of doing it. He delegates the authority to his steward; compounds the fraud and, instead of improving their lot, increases their burdens. This effort at brotherhood fails, because it is too private and too worldly. It takes Moscow's burning to restore him to his own. Imprisoned with common fellows, shorn of possessions and power, he suffers in his person the humiliation, the pain, and sorrows of man's

common lot. He recovers his humanity through his actual knowledge and sharing of brotherhood. The burning symbolizes Russia's ordeal and his own, and they become one. At this climactic moment the purification by fire frees him of that which has divided him from his own, as the empty burning city miraculously turns Napoleon's army into a mob and foretells Russia's deliverance. The false leaders, his own false ideas, are literally burned away. The mystical brotherhood between all Russians, at the price of this ordeal, is renewed. Like the good craftsman he is, Tolstoy does not let this happen too generally. He uses Pierre's close companionship with a fellow prisoner in a series of concrete incidents to bring about his regeneration. His other companions in sorrow he later forgot, but "Platon Karataev remained for ever in his mind the strongest and most precious memory and the personification of everything Russian, kindly, and round." There is an indestructibility about the almost peasant Karataev. This is the indestructibility of life itself, of the seasonal return, which all men know but which the peasant knows instinctively. He is the Russian Everyman, who prays to horse saints, because all life receives his compassion. He speaks like the countryman in proverbs: "Let me lie down like a stone, O God, and rise up like new bread"; of Moscow, "She's the mother of cities. One must be sad to see it (the burning). Yes, the maggot gnaws the cabbage, but it dies before it's done." Pierre, lying beside him, feels "that the world that had been shattered was rising up now in his soul, in new beauty, and on new foundations that could not be shaken."

What has been shattered are the false illusions, the false education, which have stood in the way of Pierre's true destiny. The means to and meaning of this destiny have all along been about him, only he was blind and divided against himself. Karataev has been the interpreter, as Kutuzov interprets for all Russia. In his presence Pierre rises up like new bread. The maggot Napoleon dies before he can finish his destruction, and dies not from the strategy of foreign generals but of the corruptible before the incorruptible, which is the force of life itself, defined by the Russian's feeling for the land which bears him. Lubbock was right as far as he went in saying the book was about the turn of one generation; but this is merely one aspect of the total

meaning. The illusion of life was so magnificently done that it misled Lubbock. There is such variety of character and circumstance that the core of meaning is overlaid, but this is just as it should be. Only by such means can the idea become fiction. Behind all this teeming life is the Russian land as the image of the seasonal pattern, youth, middle age, old age, and death; then birth again—the indestructibility of life, whose two extreme phases are death and regeneration. But the physical expanse of land is too great to see, too great even of itself for man to have any feeling about it until he personifies it. For Russia this personification is the image of the Little Mother, as Moscow is the mother of cities.

It is the acceptance of this which regenerates Pierre. Lubbock complains that the story diminishes its effect by becoming the story of the private lives of Natasha and the others, but he fails to see what Natasha, after her marriage to Pierre, represents apart from this privacy. Both she and Pierre have changed, but certainly not to take into account the effect of experience would be false. Certainly Lubbock has made nothing of Pierre's moment of illumination. After his expiation in sorrow, out of which has come his revelation, for it is nothing less than this, every decision he makes is the right decision, for he has now come into his total inheritance. He has no difficulty in deciding on business matters. He is freed by death from the false wife, Hélène. The toast of Petersburg dies of an abortion. By her attempt to evade child-bearing she denies her natural function only to discover nature's penalty and man's incompetence before nature. This is Tolstoy's final comment on Petersburg. Pierre then marries Natasha, and the girl of all time becomes the mother of all time; and Natasha represents in the personal, private and institutional life which she and Pierre make what Holy Russia represents in the mystical and finally the religious acceptance of the eternal, ever-recurring source of life. And life is indestructible.

And it is this, this particular sense of life, struggling to break through the alien form which the state suffers and, privately, to deliver the soul from its carnal appetites, which becomes the kernel of meaning in the book; or to put it another way, becomes the image, or rather images, for there are almost as many as the degree and variety of experience permits. Pierre is the most

comprehensive one. But there is his counterpart, Prince Andrew, whose most characteristic feature is intellectual pride, that sin above all most difficult to overcome. This pride leads him to worship false gods, to endanger his love for Russia. It almost causes him to ruin Natasha. So great is it that only death can bring him into the right relationship to his love and to his land. Nicholas, the delightful boy of all time, becomes the best master of all time, because his simple heart, almost a natural innocence, has resisted, or has not even been affected by the false mask which has been the occasion for the action of the book. Like the peasant, he must exhibit and suffer and achieve the virtues man can, since Adam, the first Immigrant, was turned away from the Garden. But his instinct turns him to Princess Marya who teaches him compassion and pity, and out of love for her he learns self-discipline and restraint which with his natural gifts and simple pursuit of his interests make him the best master within the peasants' memory.

And so I could go on, but it is not my purpose to burden you with a complete exegesis of *War and Peace*. That would take time indeed. I have hoped to be discursive enough to show an approach to the total reading of fiction as fiction, particularly when it is laid in past time, which, like the other arts, also gives that impression of life as it lifts the reader out of the accidents and the mechanics of living and, momentarily at least, elevates the imagination to the intensity of vision.



In Defense of a Passionate and Incorruptible Heart

BEFORE A GROWING nihilism in literature I want to talk about a book and its heroine, a book which is now neglected in its own country before the existentialist sense of experience and the misuse of the stream of consciousness by certain contemporary authors. Book and heroine bear the same name: Madame Bovary. These extreme changes in attitude towards fiction are not limited to France. There are those writers in our own tongue who have neglected the fullest inheritance of the crafts of fiction. This neglect is a part of that chill sense of chaos, unseen but felt (chaos casts no shadow), which threatens Christendom. I am using the word deliberately. The servile view, no doubt, would hold it anachronistic; at least outmoded. Certainly it is ancient, but so is the society it denominates. It is universal but composed of concrete particulars which a term such as the West, for example, lacks. As a term for our society the West is too geographical; it is to the secular society of our day a submerged half-truth, for the

symbolic meaning of the West is death, the grave, the night sea journey; and in spite of the blatant political public assertion that the West is power, underneath we feel the threat of its eternal mythological meaning. And this makes for a fearful speculation in so far as it is separated from its completing symbol, the East, which promises renewal of life and light. This failure to consider together the two halves which make a whole remotely, but surely, has to do with the present state of letters. I know I speak a platitude, but never before in our culture have the arts disclosed so sensitively our essential disorder: in fiction a kind of energetic formlessness, an intensive enlargement of a part for the whole, an obscene preoccupation with the personality of the author rather than with his work, and last, eroticism everywhere replacing love. Perhaps it is all right to publish anything. The only good censorship is that which censors itself (particularly when the mind is Carthaginian); but to say that *Fanny Hill* is literature and not what it is, successful pornography which boys have been reading in barn lofts and beneath school desks for generations, is going a little far. And yet it is this far we have come.

It seems to me that at this point there are good grounds to look at Flaubert's masterpiece once more. I will not weary you by saying over again how Flaubert suffered over *le mot juste*, which he did; nor how he personified the devoted artist, which he was; nor will I use one of those grand words such as realism or naturalism, which to my knowledge never helped anybody to read. I will go so far as to say that his excessive use of detail almost spoiled his book, for too much or too little detail makes for an abstraction; and abstraction is the death of fiction. But he always saved himself this calamity, since he never lost the sense of what he was about. This is most clearly seen in his paragraphs. These, rather than the sentence, seem to be the units of his structure. They present a succession of shocks of truth, usually by putting at the end of the paragraph a contrary image or an involved apposition of what has gone before. For example, the dinner preceding the Marquis' ball, where the luxury of the board goes beyond appetite, the over-warm air blending the smells of flowers and fine linen and truffles, red lobster claws overhanging the dishes, napkins folded like bishops' mitres (here a controlling image)—to bring into relief this ritual of sensuality, suddenly, like

an apparition, as the paragraph closes, there is a statue of a woman standing upon the porcelain stove, "draped to the chin," gazing motionless upon the room full of such life. In the way of good art, without statement, the reader receives the statue as a threat, a moral reproof, suggesting both the blind scales of justice and the aloofness of Fate.

But this paragraph only prepares us for a deeper involvement, which brings the action immediately to Emma. At the head of the table sits the old Duc de Laverdiere, the only male at the woman's table. He wears a bib like a child; his mouth drools. A servant behind his chair must name for him the dishes his trembling finger points towards. The rich foods, all the ceremony of the board, the culinary arts that have gone into pleasing the eye and palate are wasted on a jaded taste and the impotence of senility. Brought to this condition by old age and aggravated by a life of debauchery, he is there to warn Emma that those in the happiest worldly circumstances must suffer, along with others, the consequences of folly as well as the common ills of humanity: sickness, old age, and death. But does she take warning? No, for the old duke has slept in the bed of queens; particularly, rumor had it, in the native bed of Queen Marie Antoinette, between Monsieur Coigny and M. de Lauzun. Instead, Emma turns aside from reality and assures herself in her delusions. This is the technical purpose of the episode. Without it she might have come to accept her common, prosaic life with Charles. But the shine of the splendor of this house convinces her that her romantic longings may be found in actuality. They do exist. She had not only seen but taken part. She will never again be satisfied with her station. Poor Emma!

So much is this so that when, later, the atmosphere of the ballroom grows heavy and footmen take chairs to break out the window panes, reality leaps into view through the peasants' faces pressed against the openings. The fresh air, the faces, peasant like Emma's own, should this time bring her to her senses, but "in the refulgence of the present hour her past life, so distinct until then, faded away completely and she almost doubted having lived it." The antitheses (at the center Flaubert's method) are never stated but are presented in juxtaposition, as here. When Emma tells her husband not to think of dancing but to keep his

place, we surmise how far she will go her desperate way, having lost the sense of her own.

Beginning with the paragraph, the juxtaposition of opposites extends itself throughout the action. As the guest of a noble house the focus of vision lies with Emma. The ball comes alive through her wonder and expectation. All the ephemeral stuff of her dreams, her sensible longings, take on substance in this rich house; yet her response alone would too sharply limit the meaning but for the invisible hand of the artist. Emma cannot possibly show more than her wants and needs, who has forgotten her peasant origin and has dismissed her husband out of an insubstantial identity with the marquis' guests, whom she will never meet again as a social equal. The intensity of her nature and the sharpness of her vision are part of the strength of the book, but we always see more than Emma. The author has arranged this. Emma sees only what he wants her to see. An almost too obvious instance of this juxtaposition is in the young viscount's two sets of waltzes. He dances first, you remember, with Emma. In the rapid whirling of the dance the lamps, the furniture, the wainscoting, the floor all turn as if of their own autonomy. It is the first time we see Emma's vertigo, I believe. Now this vertigo of Emma's is very interesting. It is the clue to the meaning of her as heroine *manqué* and to the enveloping action, or the intrinsic meaning of the book.

Emma's dress gets caught against the viscount's trousers. Their legs commingle. He looks down. She raises her eyes to his and is seized with a torpor. She stops. They start again and now with a rapid movement. "Dragging her along," the young lord quickly gets her out of sight at the end of the gallery, where she, panting and almost falling, lays her head for a moment upon his breast. Then very slowly, oh how cautious must have been this slowness on the young man's part, he, still turning, guides her back to her seat. Emma covers her eyes with her hands. When she opens them, they open upon a formal pageantlike pose. Three young men are kneeling before a fashionable young lady seated upon a stool, in mock chivalry beseeching her favor. This is the transition between the two dances and it already foreshows the nature of the difference between them. The young lady chooses the same viscount, and they dance. They pass and repass, her

body rigid, her chin bent downward; and he keeps his formal pose, figure curved, the elbow rounded, his chin thrown forward. This couple outdanced all the others, but never once did they violate the public and formal posture by the slightest suggestion of intimacy. Again Emma refuses to see more than her infatuate bemusement allows. With grudging respect she reflects: How that woman knew how to waltz!

She sees no further than a personal threat of another woman. She is unaware of her own violation of decorum, her confusion between the public and private thing. And it was this the young viscount must have feared in her, through the ridicule of his friends, for Emma does respond to his true nature, or at least to the habitual appetites he and his elegant fellows enjoy, the half-easy management of loose women and thoroughbred horses. We are asked to notice that "those who were beginning to grow old had an air of youth, while there was something mature in the faces of the young." This something mature is the look of satiety; and since the aging lack a true vocation, merely prolonging the same kind of self-indulgence, there is no mark of struggle or true risk stamped upon their features. The situation in this house, at this ball, is this: we have the manners and lineage of nobility, but a nobility which has lost its proper function, to advise the king and defend the realm.

The feudal lord had long been replaced by a professional army. (On the knowledge of this Louis Sixteenth tried to tax the nobility, but the lords selfishly fought to retain privileges they no longer earned as defenders of the realm. The king chiefly failed in his efforts because of Necker, a Swiss banker and father of Mme. de Staël, who used this failure to set nobles against king, as he had already set commons against nobles.) So it is that by Emma's time the marquis can claim only sentimentally to belong to an estate of the realm. He and his kind are now a part of the fashionable world of money; indeed the *haute bourgeoisie* with a title. The one sound at the ball which the music does not muffle is the clink of gold *louis* at the card tables. The reason for the ball is not a social one; it is to get the marquis elected to *parlement* like any Republican. He has given firewood to the peasants, but his political ball gives away the sacred rites of hospitality. He, too, has confused the public and the private thing, as he showed as

deep a confusion when he replaced the family *château* with an Italian country house. No doubt this was the fashionable taste of the moment, but since building is the surest evidence of a culture's self-belief and expression, we know how to judge the marquis. Fashion is closely connected with money; manners with the formal mask of good breeding, the possessor learning charity from responsibility, as well as enjoying protection of person and position from vulgar intrusion. When we reflect upon the reason for the ball, we see the subtle perversion of manners in the way the marquise greets Emma, "as amicably as if she had known her for a long time." The reproof to this change of status comes about, again by apposition. Looking out of the past, when this family performed its true vocation, the ancestors hang upon the walls of the Italian country house as a sign of what has been lost. Cracked with varnish and age, nevertheless they show no ambiguity about the black letters beneath the gold frames: "Jean-Antoine d'Andervilliers d'Yverbonville, Count de la Vaubyessard, and Baron de la Fresnaye, *killed at* the battle of Coutras on the 20th of Oct. 1587." Again: "Jean-Antoine-Henry Guy d'Andervilliers de la Vaubyessard, Admiral of France and Chevalier of the order of St. Michael, *wounded at* the battle of . . . , and so on. Of course, Emma sees none of this; but she does not miss the buckle above the well-turned calf.

Thoroughbred horses play a distinct role in this chapter. Just before she leaves for home, the marquis shows Emma through his stables, as he says, "to amuse the young woman." There is in this, of course, the contrast between Emma's house and that of her host, since the floor of the harness room is kept better than Emma's parlor. But that has to do with the action proper. The enveloping action has to do with the thoroughbreds themselves. They are the animal counterparts to the portraits on the wall. These thoroughbreds are now kept for sport and pleasure. One hears of purses of gold won by their speed. A young lord is annoyed because a printer has misspelled a horse's name. These animals are better kept than the loose, easily-managed women, but nothing so shows the nobles' loss of caste. Once the horse existed to carry the fighting lord to battle or upon the hunt. On the hunt or at battle it was of crucial utility. Now the creatures run because of their owner's vanity, to keep up style or social

prestige, idly to show possession. Where life, the welfare of the kingdom—not prestige—depended upon the mount, no proper noble would have demeaned himself or the horse by taking a young lady to the stables “to amuse her.”

It should begin to be clear that the book is not a story about provincial mores, nor a mere flouting of the bourgeois mind. Nor is it a biography, as Mr. Tate feels, “of a silly, sad, and hysterical little woman,” whom Flaubert according to Mr. Lubbock “knows to be utterly worthless.” How could this be, when Flaubert himself said, “*Madame Bovary, c'est moi.*” Of course you can't believe much what an author says about his work. Flaubert told the Goncourts what he really had in mind in writing Bovary was the color grey. The author's comments will always be more or less than the work itself. The reader must read the work as if it were done by an anonymous hand. Nothing but the work itself can reveal itself. And so I am going to look more narrowly at Madame Bovary, and never once at her critics, even though one may be her creator.

The bourgeois values, of course, deeply involve the action, but not quite, I think, as we have been led to believe. The disruption of Christian polity in the sixteenth century violated the entire order of Christendom by upsetting the relationship between the lords temporal and the lords spiritual. The outcome gave God one overseer, the king. For the first time the word was made carnal, and how dangerous the word may become, shorn of its spiritual restraint, may be seen in Machiavelli's book, *The Prince*. This was the book which showed the princes of Europe they might rule, free of spiritual counsel, looking only to their wills for guidance. The word remained creative and it created Henry VIII and his minister Cromwell, who at the time of the rigging of the evidence against Sir Thomas More had a manuscript copy of *The Prince* at hand. Because the drama of this revolution came clearly to focus in Sir Thomas More's imprisonment and death, he may be taken as the great protagonist, the defender of the common good of Europe, and his sense of what was good for England could not be separate from this. When Cromwell, the Machiavellian, lost his head, all he could say was: I have offended my prince and I die. But not so More. The king feared his probity and the divinity of his language. He cautioned him not to

speak too long from the scaffold. More took the challenge and his words went all around Europe. They closed, "I die my king's good servant, but God's first."

More's death marks the second fall of man, the fall into history. Instead of a theology for the whole, history, man judging man's acts, and explaining them too, became the reward of behavior. Gradually the world came to be looked upon not as the grounds for the drama of the soul, but as the end in itself. The Christian vision dimmed. Estates became classes, that is, man was defined by his economic status, the heresy being that the economic man assumed the posture of the whole man, the Christian. The state is still Christian. It has entered its Satanic phase of false illusions. A part is taken for the whole. This is the oldest lie of all, appearance not representing reality. Man is made in God's image. To say that man is only matter, only a sensibility, is the subtlest lie of all.

It is this lie which Flaubert pushes to an absurdity in the enveloping action of *Madame Bovary*. He makes a society totally carnal and secular. The bourgeoisie appears not as a class among classes, but as *the* class which has usurped every estate, institution, trade, occupation, vocation, avocation in the world which victimizes Madame Bovary. By having the bourgeois mind as the only mind exposes the monstrous deformity and impossibility of such a world, a world entirely material. The isolated ego, money, physical appetites, the categories of the mortal sins (without promise of redemption)—such do the actors in this narrative show; such is the substance of the composite life parodying the divine scheme, Substance of the very Substance. It follows that the only guide to conduct is selfishness, and so we find it in the action, with two minor exceptions: Catherine Laroux and Justin, Homais' cousin whom he treats as a servant. Catherine is given a silver medal worth twenty-five francs for fifty years' devoted service on one farm. Part of the moral is satire: that her devotion should be worth less than an animal's prize money. But the intention is again in the juxtaposition of meaning. She is a Christian in a Satanic world. Her first thought is to give the medal to her priest, because her only thought is of giving. The boy Justin loves Emma as love should love, without asking anything in return. His innocence and incorruptibility feels through the corrupt outward surface to Emma's uncompromising

heart. She scarcely notices him, but he doesn't care. He is glad to be in her presence or do her service in the most menial ways. He can refuse her nothing and ironically he does not refuse her the means of death. Afterwards he alone is her disinterested mourner, grieving at night by her grave in privacy. When Lestiboudois returns for a spade, the intrusion drives the boy away. Again the method: the grave digger can only think that he has found the thief who has robbed his potato patch, for Lestiboudois is not only the sacristan and grave digger; he also does odd jobs about the town. And he plants potatoes in the burying ground. They grow very well next to the graves. The priest jests with him, saying you live off the dead. All in this action live off the dead, because they live off each other, and all are dead here, for death in the world is what is left after the spirit departs. In a small way Lestiboudois exemplifies this most clearly. He rents the church chairs for his own gain; he rings the bell for vespers at his pleasure. The Church instead of being served by him, is a convenience for him; yet he is not entirely happy. He cannot enjoy the fee he gets for digging a grave, for the loss of that much potato ground. The priest is worse, because he betrays more; or, rather, because of the material usurpation, he does not understand his office. Since meaning is no longer contained by its proper forms, we get the shell without any content, or we get essence distorted by the half-form, the sentimental, or even the wrong form. We get this, particularly, in the romantic and sensual images.

Emma in her nature is incorruptible and inviolate. Her drama is this incorruptibility against the false education she undergoes from her society and the abortive flights she takes in her effort to find what will complete her. Her passionate nature, her great capacity for love, has only the vagaries of sentimental and romantic images (her sensuality) as the means for her quest. Her vertigo arises from the abyss where her passions and needs, deprived of proper outlets, must whirl violently about, reaching for the proper forms to allow her nature to function. All she is offered for husband is an oaf and a fool, Charles; the lesser counterpart, Leon; the equally incomplete Rodolphe. Emma does not settle for anything less than reality, and that for her is complete love. So she must follow the furies, and in her search for

what she can never find grow more and more desperate, subject to the very corruption of the things which thwart her, until she takes her life.

I have tried to indicate what has happened to the lords temporal in the example of the marquis and his companions: money and fashion, instead of nobility and service. His class—no longer estate—has played its crucial part in Emma's disaster. But how is it that her parents gave her so poor an upbringing. Emma's mother died early, but M. Rouault, the father, was another matter. He was a farmer of some substance. There is no better farmer than the French peasant, whether large or small. Farming supports the state as bread life. There was never until recently any misunderstanding among the French about this. "Agriculture," Napoleon dictated to Las Cases, "is the soul, the foundation of the kingdom: industry ministers to the comfort . . . foreign trade is the superabundance," and of secondary importance. This is the exact opposite of the economy of the plutocratic state. Emma's father has lost this sense of his occupation. He complained that no farmer was a millionaire. He suffered the basic usurpation of money. He was losing it every year, but he "more than held his own in the market place, where he relished all the tricks of the trade." This is to say that his interests and values were those of the *petit bourgeois*, not of a farmer. "—no one was less suited than he to the actual growing of crops and the managing of a farm. He never lifted a finger if he could help it, and never spared any expense in matters of daily living: he insisted on good food, a good fire, and a good bed. He liked his cider hard, his leg of mutton rare, his coffee laced with brandy. He took his meals in the kitchen, alone, facing the fire, at a little table that was brought in to him already set, like on a stage." One begins to understand Emma's hopes at the marquis' board. There was a difference only in degree and not in kind between the spurious marquis' and the spurious peasant's establishments. The difference was not in the need for luxury but money. When Charles proposed, M. Rouault was in the process of selling twenty-two acres of ground to pay his debts. That is an awful lot of land in France to eat up, and a true peasant would have considered it a calamity. It helped him to make up his mind to give Emma to Charles. Being a trader, he knew that Charles was a

poor kind of a man, but M. Rouault felt he would make no trouble about the dowry. Since Emma also was not worth much to him on the farm, his care for money, not love, delivered her to her fate. At the convent the nuns had already failed her: her "nature, positive in the midst of enthusiasms, that had loved the Church for the sake of the flowers, and music for the words of the songs, and literature for its passionnal stimulus, rebelled against the mysteries of faith as she grew irritated by discipline." Why didn't the sisters instruct her in both discipline and doctrine? One gathers that the sisters, instead of preparing their pupil for her role in the world, sought to make her one of their own; that is, they saw the narrow interests of their order instead of the good of the pupil. She left confused between appearance and reality and with little spiritual discipline.

This kind of betrayal follows Emma to the bitter end. The head of the state is Louis Philippe, king of France. What should be the symbol of authority among kings—a sword, a scepter, the globe itself? With Louis Philippe it was an umbrella, just as good almost as an English banker. There is the innkeeper, Madame François. She thinks of her own convenience and is jealous for her inn, and longs for her competitor's ruin. The agricultural fair is a public matter common to all, but not to Madame François: the people will not be eating with her. Madame Rollet, who keeps Emma's child, has no love for the child or her work. She does it purely for pay and the small luxuries she can wheedle out of her customers. For pay she becomes part of the deception Emma must practice in her affair with Leon. M. Guillaumin, the lawyer, with the mannerisms and dress of the English bar, who should be the agency of justice, at least subordinate to his client's appeal, is nothing of the sort. He is a sensualist, ill-mannered, given one suspects to shady practices, using the bar to take advantage, and is so hardened to appeal that he cannot see Emma's desperation, when she comes to him for help—indeed he does not stop eating breakfast—but tries to seduce her. His man does seduce her maid. M. Binet, the tax collector, bears a special importance to the action, although his appearance is infrequent. An official of the state, he hunts out of season. This gives him pleasure. His vocation, collecting money he doesn't earn, and his avocation, turning on a lathe napkin rings which he does not sell,

both reveal his basic frivolity. He lives off the work of others, and the tool which should aid man in making something of use merely turns to fill the mind's emptiness. The ring he makes is the perfect figure, but here it rounds off the abyss underlying all who take part in the action. In a way he and his occupation stand for the controlling image. Money is a good when it serves as the medium of exchange for goods and services. A machine, when it helps man to make something useful, is a good. When it takes the place of man, or serves him in his idleness, it is an evil. To let it turn to no purpose, as it does for M. Binet, is a symbol of its ultimate possibility, man evicted and the machine running in a silent world. As a sound it enters and becomes the substance and definition of Emma's state when she stands before the window of her attic, having learned of Rodolphe's betrayal, looking down into the square below, being pulled to jump by this insistent sound of chaos, Binet's lathe humming and turning in her head, the very sound of her vertigo. Every time she is betrayed by the deformed images of love her need for the real thing ejects the spurious forms and conventions, leaving her to the mercy of this vertigo.

If Emma fares poorly in her upbringing, her husband Charles fares worse, partly in the paucity of natural gifts, and these quickly abused by his parents. His father is an instance of the derangement which follows upon an absence of any spiritual control. The forms of behavior are all eccentric and to himself and others they never represent what they seem to be. His only response is to appetite. This led him to the debauch of himself, his wife's property, until at forty-five, eaten up with envy, discontent, cursing heaven, disgusted with mankind, he shut himself away to live at peace, a condition that would forever be denied him, because he wanted something for nothing. This is the first article in the constitution of Hell. It is not enough for a man to act: he must be willing to assume responsibility for his acts: and this is not enough either: he must with knowledge assume it, and that knowledge inevitably must recognize that each man is capable of committing all mortal and venial sins. This knowledge, called in mythology the co-operating opposites, must be known and integrated in the total personality of a man. M. Bovary was

forever out of balance. His very appearance was a lie: he had the look of a bully with the easy cajoling ways of a travelling salesman. His dress was that of a soldier and its opposite, the man about town. He had been drummed out of the army. He alternated his son's discipline according to whim. At times he gave him a Spartan regimen, at times let him run naked and wild, be natural in Rousseau's sense. Charles's mother was just as bad. Taken in by the sensual appeal of her husband, for which she suffered, she later tried to recover her life through her son's. But to save money, she gave him no proper schooling. When he did go away he was withdrawn too soon; then, pushed beyond his talents in his professional training, he failed, later passed by memory work. She married him to a dry piece of meat, a widow with property. This turned out to be fraudulent, as the world taken for itself always is. The woman died when exposed, and Charles was free to court Emma. The clue is this: Charles felt some small grief—for his wife? No. He said, "After all, she loved me."

The morning after the bridal night with Emma, it was Charles who seemed the virgin. Emma revealed nothing, so that the shrewdest dame at the wedding could make nothing of it, and this was because Emma was thinking of the words felicity, passion, rapture, that had seemed so beautiful to her in books, and which indeed should have lasted out the honeymoon. Their absence did not cause her to say: I was mistaken; I will accept what I find. Instead she wondered if there were not certain spots on earth which must bring happiness, as plants are peculiar to sympathetic soils. She sadly thought of herself in a Scotch cottage, drifting about in melancholy, with a lover attired in a black velvet coat and thin shoes. The harsh truth of what the highlands would have done to those shoes or the manure pile to her melancholy she, a farm girl, should have known. When form and content become separate or mixed, the imagination must still do its work. If the proper material is unavailable, it will use what is at hand, even if this is romantic or sentimentally absurd. Rightly and naturally Emma expected her husband to initiate her into the felicities of marriage and the mysteries of life. She showed herself gifted in all domestic matters, even as she was in those of love—until her

patience ran out. Charles taught her nothing, knew nothing, wished for nothing but the gross satisfaction of his appetities. An oaf and a fool, he bored his wife with platitudes. His table manners were disgusting, his bedroom manners worse; and because he was pleased and flattered by her obvious charms and talents, because he was pleased, he assumed she was happy. At last her patience rejected what was fake and selfish, so that her legal husband in his human and personal failure sent her upon her ill-starred quest.

A quality easily overlooked in Emma's character is her innate modesty. We get the sense of it when finally she yields to Rodolphe, for in spite of her concupiscent day dreams, she was slow to come to adultery. Her surrender is almost a yielding of purity and innocence, the shame of revelation, that ultimate violation of self which makes the common pattern of life. It was not merely Leon's inexperience and lack of courage which prevented their mutual attraction from becoming intimate at first. She was eaten with desires, with rage and hate, but it was the common series of betrayals which were responsible for these emotions—not because she couldn't have Leon. She thought it was so. The sound of his step thrilled her; the sight of him at a distance filled her with voluptuousness. However, in his presence the emotion subsided. The reality of Leon was not what she wanted. She was using at a distance his form and features to receive the images of her frustration. In reality he was too frail a reed to bear the weight of her demands. After he goes away, she is afflicted with a disease common to virgins at a certain time of life: the green sickness. As far as the essence and being of her nature is concerned, she has not been touched by Charles. She is still virginal and still seeking a completing love. In despair she turns to God. She tries to turn to God, and through the proper channel of the Church ("inclined to no matter what devotions, so that her soul would become absorbed and all existence lost in it"). But just as the lord temporal misled her, now the lord spiritual in the person of the parish priest completely fails her. He is a mere functionary, given particularly to the mortal sins of sloth and gluttony.

In a summary we learn that the church is rotting at the top, is

dominated by secular authority. Emma happens upon the priest just after he has eaten. He is breathing heavily; his habit is dirty and greasy and stained by tobacco. She comes upon him as he is about to teach the boys their catechism.

“How are you?” he asks.

“Not well,” replied Emma. “I am ill.”

“Well, and so am I,” answered the priest. “These first warm days weaken one most remarkably, don’t they? But, after all, we are born to suffer, as St. Paul says. But what does M. Bovary think of it?”

“He!” she said with a gesture of contempt.

“What!” replied the good fellow, quite astonished, “doesn’t he prescribe something for you?”

“Ah!” said Emma, “it is no earthly remedy I need.”

This is the direct appeal which almost automatically a priest should respond to, but this false priest doesn’t hear, allows a secondary matter such as the behavior of the boys to divert him, and answers her with their biographies instead of responding to what must have been an obvious need for spiritual counsel. Politely he asks after her husband, but she seems not to hear; so he answers for her, “Always busy, no doubt; for he and I are certainly the busiest people in the parish. But he is a doctor of the body,” he added with a thick laugh, “and I of the soul.”

She fixed her pleading eyes upon the priest. “Yes,” she said, “you solace all sorrows.”

This is his answer. “Ah! Don’t talk of it, Madame Bovary. This morning I had to go to Bas-Diauville for a cow that was ill; they thought it was under a spell . . . ,” and so forth. He is interrupted by the boys and says when he resumes, “. . . farmers are much to be pitied.”

“Others, too,” she replied.

“Assuredly. Town laborers, for example.”

“It is not they . . . ,” she begins

“Pardon. I’ve there known poor mothers of families, virtuous women, I assure you, real saints, who wanted even bread.”

“But those,” replied Emma, and the corners of her mouth twitched as she spoke, “those, M. la Curé, who have bread and no . . .”

“Fire in the winter. . . .”

Emma gives up as she has with her husband. “My God, my God,” she sighs.

“Do you feel unwell?” he asked, approaching her anxiously. “It is indigestion, no doubt? You must get home, Madame Bovary; drink a little tea, that will strengthen you, or else a glass of fresh water with a little sugar in it.”

As she goes away, she hears:

“Are you a Christian?”

“Yes, I am a Christian.”

“What is a Christian?”

“He, who being baptized, baptized, baptized. . . .”

The priest has done no better with the boys than with Emma. Baptism is the official entry into a new life of hope, but here by implication it goes no further. The secularization of the church will be more formidably reinforced at the cathedral in Rouen, where Leon is waiting for Emma. Young men from time immemorial have waited in church porches for assignations with their girls, but never before with such vulgarity. The house of prayer seems to Leon a glowing boudoir.

Forsaken by the priest, Emma allows herself to be seduced by Rodolphe. He has a château, but he is neither a lord nor a rich peasant, merely a bourgeois with a piece of country property. He is lazy and with no attachment or feeling of responsibility for the land. In dress he had that “incongruity of common and elegant in which the habitually vulgar think they see the revelation of an eccentric existence. . . .” It is at the agricultural fair that he begins his seduction of Emma. The officials and entourage of this fair are made up of an agglomeration of Rodolphests. The vulgarity, the petty vanities, the pompous speeches given with such self-applauding solemnity, the glib patronizing of the farmers by the officials—all this, the insincerity, the disparity between the nobility of the animals and the mean prizes in money which their owners receive, stand for the comic chorus, which reinforces the play of seduction going on between Emma and Rodolphe in the council chamber. The comedy is here, but the reader cannot miss the agreement between the inane mediocrity of the bourgeoisie in its public occasion and the private performance of Rodolphe, whose end is only a sensual interlude. Before

he has had Emma, he is already wondering how he can get rid of her. In this instance the juxtaposition of public and private comes to the same thing.

Materialism in its absolute state may be found in the autonomy of the senses. Instead of being the avenues, the means by which mind and heart, imagination and soul inform man of the world and the hope of the hereafter, carnality makes the senses the end in themselves, which inevitably reach exhaustion by over-use, exposing the monotony of lust or any appetite. This is the history of the first part of Emma's affair with Rodolphe. Its form is as usual the juxtaposition of opposites. The great adultery can only seem good to her at first, because marriage with Charles has been so poor a matter. However, it is true marriage she wants to feel with Rodolphe. She wants to exchange rings and think of their mothers looking down from heaven in approval. This is a sentimentality, but again because she is allowed to use only the spurious form of emotion and belief. Once this is understood, we find her having all the qualities which love must have or die: she is tender, bold, reckless, giving, imaginative in the arts of love itself, but especially she gives herself without reservation, until she is betrayed. Her need must truly be great to be so long in misunderstanding her lover. Rodolphe is almost saved by her. "This love without debauchery was a new experience for Rodolphe." He was drawn from his lazy habits, but no further than caressing his pride and sensuality, so that their affair was like a continual seduction. In other words his senses were too jaded to be reborn through love. This great lack allowed the perpetual seduction to simmer like any lukewarm domestic flame. A letter from her father awakens her to what has happened. She is aware of what she has lost by the way and wonders if it were not better to have remained true to her marriage. Instinctively she demands of Charles what all wives demand of their husbands: something to respect, in his case professional excellence. What she forgot was his inadequacy and a commitment to folly. His grotesque failure in operating on a club foot set husband and wife finally apart, returned her to Rodolphe and ruin.

The affair is resumed this time with ardor and depravity, in which Emma takes the lead. But she knows the world has failed her utterly. She can only think of going away, as a desperate

measure of finding that soil which will allow the true affections to thrive. She almost persuades Rodolphe, but his selfishness is the counterpart to her false vision. He will not exile himself with a child on his hands. His last thoughts are: "and besides the worry, the expense." He consigns her to God and sprinkles the betraying letter with water, simulating tears.

The deception was Emma's self-deception, but the shock was no less severe. It almost brought her to a premature suicide. It did make her dangerously ill. The vertigo, the various illnesses, must be seen as the passionate, devoted, absolute commitment to love and grace. Thwarted as she is, they measure by deprivation the reality of her need. Again she turns to God and again the priest fails her. He is frightened by her fervor, her vision of God. His remedy is to write a bookseller for literature suitable for a lady in difficulty, but the very word of God was falsified by a shoddy craftsmanship in writing; and betrayed again by the criminal failure of the priest, she drifted into the pride of devoutness, to an excessive alms-giving, and from this to the final episode of her quest, that passionate wrong pursuit of the real thing.

At each crisis it is Homais, the druggist, who is the agent for the act which drives Emma further towards her ruin. It was he who brought Charles to Yonville; it was he who, reading in the paper about a theory of operating on a club foot, suggested it to Charles. Only Charles's ignorance of surgery would take a druggist's knowledge of it as meaningful. Homais suggests to Charles that the Opera in Rouen is the very thing to divert Emma, and this brings about the final episode to ruin. He becomes not only responsible for the disastrous affair with Leon, but his vanity actually is able to make available the poison which kills her. So far has Homais to do with the specific action. But his chief role is to represent the enveloping action, that state of society in which the absolute value, the only value, is material. Once the earthly kingdom imitated the divine one. Now there is only the kingdom of this world, and Homais is its first citizen. As devil's disciple he stands for the false appearance of things. His actual knowledge is limited to drugs; yet he prescribes for disease. Not being a doctor, he can do this only out of opinion—that is, ignorance. By use of the means, herbs, he usurps the end and brings not life but death. His self-assurance, not his knowledge,

convinces the peasants that he knows more than the doctors. He stands for every phase of the usurpation, only secular values, information for learning, opinion for knowledge, the confusion of form and content, inhuman in his human relationships. One quotation will be enough. When asked what farming matters to him, he replies, "Do you think that to be an agriculturist it is necessary to have tilled the earth or fattened fowls oneself? It is necessary rather to know the composition of the substances in question—the geological strata, the atmospheric actions, the quality of the soil, the minerals, the waters, the density of the different bodies, their capillarity, and what not." How is this known: "one must keep pace with science by means of *pamphlets* and *public papers*." This makes him a comic figure, but the comedy turns rather grim when Emma dies of it.

All the second-hand reports of knowledge pass through Homais' mind as through a sieve. He becomes the parody of man trying to exercise what only God can know. To accept the numbering of the arts and sciences for knowledge, as the state does in giving him the Legion of Honor, shows the criminal folly of the kind of education and treatment which brings Madame Bovary to her death. Lest we miss the point, we have the blind beggar of Rouen, the controlling image of this action. He is corrupt throughout with disease: "A mass of rags covered his shoulders, and an old staved-in beaver, turned out like a basin, hid his face; but when he took it off he discovered in the place of eyelids empty and bloody orbits. The flesh hung in red shreds, and there flowed from it liquids that congealed into green scales down to the nose." And so forth; yet Homais promises to cure him if he will come to Yonville. For this corruption Homais offers a pomade. When the blind beggar tells it up and down the highway, the state which has given to usurped knowledge the Legion of Honor, now incarcerates another victim.

The story now quickly ends. The money lender brings on the final catastrophe. Emma's borrowing (she could have got on without it) represents the blindness of her desperate pursuit, for we all know that money, where debts are involved, has one sure quality: it will take no substitute. It will be paid in the coin of the realm and with interest, usury in a Satanic society being no longer forbidden but the very support of the state. Emma's last appeal to

Rodolphe almost renews his passion, until money is mentioned. By now Emma can appeal only in terms of this agency, no longer in terms of herself. But there is one true sense of herself that refuses invasion. It is desperate, blind, but it has not been touched in its integrity; and this is her quest for the sacrament of love. Finding nothing but the spurious, soul and flesh maimed by the opposite of what she has sought, she will not compromise, not even in death. "She stretched forward her neck [towards the crucifix] as one who is thirsty, and glueing her lips to the body of the Man-God, she pressed upon it with all her expiring strength the fullest kiss of love that she had ever given." Then the priest gives her extreme unction.

As the oiled thumb passes, the two parts of the structure are revealed by a kind of final juxtaposition of opposites: the image of her demand for love against the corrupt means by which she has had to seek it. The sensibility, instead of uniting mind, heart, and imagination in the love she sought, has been made to divert, distort, and waste the substance of life. The thumb, "First upon the eyes that had so coveted all worldly pomp; then upon the nostrils, that had been greedy of the warm breeze and amorous odors; then upon the mouth, that had uttered lies, that had curled with pride and cried out in lewdness; then upon the hands that had delighted in sensual touches; and finally upon the soles of the feet, so swift of yore, when she was running to satisfy her desires, and that would now walk no more."

As controlling image, the living disease, the loathesome corruption of the blind beggar of Rouen, is outside in the street, as Emma is dying. He is there for symbol of the action, the human being as victim of a society totally selfish, carnal, and material. His presence at her death is not accidental. They are equally victims in kind, if not in degree. He is singing a love ballad. It has all the innocence of spring and youth. It withholds the consequences of love. Emma herself is the consequence, and this she discovers as she rises up in bed and cries out, "The blind man," and laughs "a horrible, frenzied and despairing laugh." His presence and his song combine the essence of the action. Emma has to die to learn. Perhaps she learns only the half of truth; perhaps the other half comes quickly with the final illumination beyond death. The priest and the atheist sit up with the dead

body to emphasize further the essential meaning. The priest sprinkles holy water; the druggist, chlorine solution. The priest says we will end by understanding each other. They already understand. Bread and wine is spread for their repast. Not the blood and body of our Lord ends the action, but the worldly bread and wine to appease their carnal appetites, as it diverts them from the smell of decay, which, being exuded by the dead flesh, becomes the final symbol of death in life, the description of the society that has undone Emma.



The Hero with the Private Parts

THE WRITERS WHO will appear in these pages may all in some way be called impressionists, but it will be the burden of this piece to show how little is the help, in reading, of the large definitions. Realism, naturalism, impressionism, existentialism—all these derive from philosophy. They are pseudo-philosophical terms, and they are of some help. There are times when discourse needs comparisons, needs formulae. Such terms discriminate the larger areas of learning; but they remain signposts, showing the way only towards the discovery of the individual talent, which is there to be read for itself, for its unique contribution, not as evidence of a school. Yet the terms are honorable, of long standing, and for the critic, when he is not deliberately trying to be scientific, useful. But they must be remade in sympathy and understanding to serve the arts.

And this latest of the arts in language, fiction, has suffered most from inadequate critical tools. Verse has inherited numerous

formal aids; fiction—itself a bad enough word for what it represents—depends for its formal control upon the point of view. The view or post of observation, to use James's definition, orders the structure which in an impressionist novel leaves nothing inert. This structure is composed of two actions: the enveloping action, which contains a universal truth or some one of the complications which forever recur upon the human scene; and secondly, the action itself which is one instance of such a truth or complication. These actions fall into two parts, the scene and the pictorial or panoramic summary. The play, of course, is composed of scenes. Fiction's peculiar distinction lies in the summary. It is of the very essence of fiction, and when the writer relies too largely upon scenes and dialogue, he diminishes his art and possibly should write for the theater.

On the stage, dialogue is supported by the living presence of the actor, his gesture, magnetism, intonation of voice. Under a good director all of the actors make the structure of the play "work." Since all of this living presence is lacking in a story or novel, the pictorial summary must take its place: it does more than this, and also less. Nothing can substitute for the living presence of the actor. However, there are areas of the mind and imagination which the spoken word neither reaches nor reveals. The extreme artificiality of the soliloquy shows what an advantage fiction has in the exploration of any part of consciousness, even to the extent of suggesting the supernatural.

It was Henry James's mastery of the panorama, perhaps, which made his plays theatrical failures. In impressionism the scene is usually limited by the restrictions of a mind seeing as well as interpreting the action, whether this mind uses the first person or the "central intelligence." There are two kinds of scenes, the objective scene which stands by itself and the scene depending upon this mind (such as the marquis' ball viewed by Emma Bovary). Although fiction can use both kinds of scenes, this last is particularly the impressionist scene. Nobody does a better scene than James; it depends upon, and fulfills, with the immediacy of sensible action, the panoramic summary which has gone before it. James, who is recognized as the first master of this method, defined it as a direct impression of life; and nothing can be more direct than a mind, involved in a crisis, receiving impressions of

others as this crisis is taking place. James learned from Turgenev not to use a contrived plot, but to control the action as it grows out of the complication. It follows that whatever sets the action in motion does so by entering and freeing the author's imagination (James took from an anecdote only what would release his own mind and story); but chiefly impressionism seems to be dependent upon the point of view or post, substituting a central intelligence or a first person for the old reportorial omniscience. And this required an intrusion into areas of the mind only crudely used before, giving the critic the inadequate terms "stream of consciousness" and "interior monologue." I hope I may be excused for stating the obvious, but no critical nomenclature exists for fiction upon which all may agree.

There may be millions of views or posts of observation, but the central intelligence can only take them one at a time; and each time there is a two-fold operation. The level of experience will be restricted by the view, but to it the author adds his own vision. Sight into the world, insight into the author's psyche, fused by the shock of recognition at the post, gives to the vision its proper form. An element of the form is generally some degree of the stream of consciousness, in which it is possible to explore the mind in all its mystery and properties as the grounds for action. One might ask why the omniscient view cannot do the same. It can, but the delusive freedom of all knowledge is generally too seductive for most writers. It tempts them to intrude their opinions; too often they report where they should render. In the impressionist novel, or rather in the novel whose view is restricted, ideally no word is used which does not forward the action. This is rarely so with discursive omniscience.

But a real danger presents itself upon entering a mind so freely. The possibilities for variety of experience are enormous; and so only the strictest view can save the fiction from redundancies, irrelevancies, obscenities more deadly than the reportorial prolixities of omniscience. The best of the impressionists understand the technical necessity for restraint in the plunge within and below consciousness. The clearest image for this act is very old: the labyrinth. The explorer may wind and cross and lose himself, so long as he holds the thread and so long as its terminal is outside the labyrinth. However, many of these writers seem not to

understand the dangers of the first person. Since this view is a prejudiced one and since it seems to carry the most authority, it requires of the author all his ingenuity. Nor can they resist the sound of the author's voice. The voice is the swiftest way to set the tone, but too often the writer falls in love with it so that the action drowns.

I suppose Henry Miller's voice is the most torrential in present-day letters. There is no *ism* which will quite define him. I would hesitate to call him an impressionist; and yet multifarious impressions of the world pass through his ego and sometimes are given form by it. He is not really an artist, and yet at times he produces works of art. He is the hero of everything he writes and is as innocent as a child speaking of himself in the third person. He is not actually a fiction writer; he is a prophet without a religion. He is a tremendous sensibility which mixes up all that is current in the world, and more often than not makes nonsense of it. For example, "the time will come when they [the poets] will communicate silently, not as poets, but as seers." You can go through almost any page of his and find brilliant assumptions, and in the next sentence contradicting sentiments. Too often you feel that all of this goes through him, like a flux, without any reflection, as if he were in a trance. And yet when he really brings it off, as in *Berthe* and in *Reunion in Brooklyn*, he manages to make of himself a fictive actor. He "immolates" himself as a person and becomes the protagonist of the story. In *Berthe*, the fictional Henry's sympathy, his bleeding heart, reveals the isolation and despair of the whore before she has become reconciled to her plight. This is so managed by the final little scene that it is not sentimental but the best kind of irony. For all his kindness and sympathy merely isolates her the more, revealing to her the hopelessness of her situation and therefore increasing her anguish.

As good as they are, these shorter pieces do not make him a fictional writer; yet all of his work comprises a kind of fictitious autobiography of modern man looking for truth and salvation. His protagonist and his view is that of a Super-ego. This Super-ego is historic man making his last stand. For this reason Miller has seemed to me to be a prophet without a religion, for try as you may you cannot make of the secular world a religious one. In

that second fall of man, the fall into history (Machiavelli's *The Prince* being the new testament for this), the individual found himself in a world of endless discretion. This is the obverse to the Christian vision, when man decried his uniqueness to become more nearly what was common to all believers. As belief in divine authority waned, the ego and its impression, the personality, alone were able to resist anonymity, confront the terror of time imitating eternity. Now the citizen confronts the very abyss itself. There is no longer the historic man to shield him.

From the beginning the impressionist has sensed the gross inadequacy of the secular world as the subject for fictive truth. The technical usage of the consciousness and the strict view is evidence of this. The invisible mind as stage forces the impression beyond external reality, downwards or within the consciousness, that area of the writer's being which is mysterious, where the opposites of good and evil will be encountered. This is not a substitute for religion, but it is a part of the religious feeling. How well the techne performs depends precariously upon the writer himself, since his private vision is no longer supported by either universal faith or the historic man.

For this reason, perhaps, there is such diversity of performance, differing levels of authority among the impressionists. The decline in the method seems to be found among those writers who never get out of the stream of consciousness (Claude Simon), or who use the first person for material it cannot handle. The succession of impressions with brief statements reporting what a person is like, the long almost abstract comparisons of human beings to natural objects, each impression taking a short chapter, with no transition—such too often is the structure of these novels. You will find exactly this in the opening chapters of anais nin's *Cities of the Interior*. The first person is so isolated within its uncontrolled reflections and sensations that it cannot withdraw critically in any sense. The married heroine has a husband, children, an incomparable housekeeper, a thriving establishment. But this is not enough for her: her romantic ego must find strange and perverse understanding and experience. This is grounds for a true action. However, to give it meaning the author should establish the fullest relationship to husband and children, housekeeper and establishment. Instead the author makes the

briefest of references to the life she will give up and the house she will set adrift. We are, therefore, not convinced affectively that she ever had a husband, children, or an establishment to sacrifice. We can only accept her in the monstrosity of her ego.

Here we have the ego turned loose, without the thread of direction, in the unconscious, the near-conscious, and the consciousness itself. This self-absorption in the accidental part of being, the great I, becomes the more monstrous the greater the sensibility it occupies. Its very monstrosity comes from its isolation from all other parts of self, and, in the artist, from the post of objectivity, of critical awareness. Like the Minotaur, that image of man's predicament, it wanders impotently among the corridors of the most intricate work of art, as in a wilderness. This suggests why the acts most real in Miller and Durrell are the sexual ones. Once sex defined male and female. Now it is reduced to the act itself, the act as the only reality left in common understanding. In a world where neither the historic man nor the whole man governs (therefore where his institutions are either empty hulls or the agencies of the state's arbitrary acts), this cultural and political predicament, as always, is anticipated by the artist. Once you accept sex, not as the source of life and human relationship, but as the meaning itself, you must accept any and all of its varieties; and you must accept them without restraint of judgment. Since it seems the last vitality, to withdraw and judge is to withdraw from life. In *The Black Book* Durrell's protagonist sums it up: the verb which means *to copulate*, he says, "has become synonymous with the verb *to be*. It is as if this act were the one assurance of existence remaining to us still." The only thing about this truth is: what are you going to do in between times? We have lost so much ground since our mythological world parents lasted out a three-hundred year embrace.

Durrell's book seems to indicate that death-in-life fills the time not only between but in the act itself. This death has for components a confusion between public and private matters: the four-letter words, acts which once would have seemed pornographic, scatology, the secret dark things exposed to light. The author's intention is to present us with the terrors of this situation. However, his characters are unequal to the occasion, and this is generally true of this kind of impressionism. Instead of

being the death of England, as he asserts, they actually represent what has always been about: the vulgarity of easy vice, easy because it has no longer behind it the threat of evil and because vulgarity is the clearest sign of life these people have.

Death in *The Black Book* is, therefore, sentimental. The ego of the first person protagonist is drawn into but does not control the action. There are comparable scenes between this fiction and *Nightwood* by Djuna Barnes which demonstrate the differences between a work of art and an imaginative book by a young man not yet in control of his medium or of his sense of reality. In *The Black Book* Tarquin, an older man attracted to a gigolo, enters his room:

He takes a few turns around the room, in such precise don's paces that he almost trips in the snowy bits. On the washstand a comb, thick with dirt and grease from Hylas' sable locks; on the pisspot holder a thriller, face down; the book he had lent the boy on the first day of his campaign for higher thinking and purer love is deep in dust. The bed lamp is on. Hylas is afraid to sleep in the dark. On the shelf is a broken enema syringe and carton of crab ointment. Tarquin explores these things with disgust.

The details are precise: they describe a boy whose sin is sloth certainly, but the meaning has been reduced to Tarquin's disgust. It doesn't go beyond the immediate relationship between the two characters because the first person uses only his eyes to report, not his mind which might render the total dramatic effect.

In *Nightwood* Nora at a crisis in her life mounts six flights to ask Doctor O'Connor "everything you know about the night." She enters his room to learn from the damned the nature of the dark, evil's atmosphere. What follows is not merely a self-contained impression but the introduction to an action which advances the total action of the book. As the door to the doctor's room opens, she "hesitates" before the incredible disorder that meets her eye. This disorder is the very order of evil. She has entered that domain, Night, where all the dark opposites hold sway. The night, the grave, the prison, the inchoate and criminal needs, the secret impulse for innocence to be ravished—all this is here in the opening scene, and it is all here in the revealing images. The room is so small "it was just possible to walk

sideways up to the bed; it was as if being condemned to the grave, the doctor had decided to occupy it with the utmost abandon." There are bars on the one small window, which suggest both the prison and the grave, that ultimate confinement after judgment. The dust and filth is here as in the other scene, but the images are more dramatically exact. The books piled to the ceiling are ruined both by dust and water: the neglect relates to and introduces the rusty forceps, the broken scalpel, odd instruments of a doctor's profession. These are juxtaposed to the twenty-odd bottles of pomades, creams, rouges, *et cetera*. In this juxtaposition the images clash, and in so doing show the evidence of the doctor's damnation. It is the betrayal of the profession, the trade, which is the masculine betrayal, since a man's work describes and judges him. The pomades follow and show another betrayal. In the scene in *The Black Book*, at the most, we get in the broken syringe neglect or abuse of the body, and the excremental parody of the act of love. The swill pail in *Nightwood* is called by its name. In *The Black Book* the shock is the surface shock of the four-letter word. The jar "swimming with abominations" in *Nightwood* is a controlling image and hence technically apt.

The doctor is discovered in bed, in a night gown, with long false curls, rouged and lashes painted, his appearance that of narcissistic innocence, not transformed in the instant of self-love but continuing into middle age. This is the innocence never truly lost, and so a perversion of both innocence and knowledge, the suggestion of both and the actuality of neither. It flashed through Nora's head, as she looked: "God, children know something they can't tell; they like Red Riding Hood and the wolf in bed!"

The true terror of his situation is that he evacuates custom only at night; the agony is that he can live only at night; that the opposites of day and night, comprising the conflict which is life, do not serve in the doctor's case. To him the day is a prison; he tries to drink it away; the night is a prison as well; it confines him in the distortion of his love, since it reduces love to the act of darkness. This is a denial of light and therefore a kind of hell. So it is that the coffin-like room, the little scene there, "is as mauled as the last agony." This becomes the reality of his being; it obliterates time in its suspension; it persists like but is not eternity. His final drunken scene protests his predicament, in the

horror of self-knowledge which only comes from knowledge of the world as it afflicts and, in afflicting, shows the self. "Now," he said, "the end—mark my words—now *nothing, but wrath and weeping!*" Wrath and weeping suggest the four last things and the inexplicable mystery of faith. In *The Black Book*, God is reduced to man and even less than the full man.

Durrell's relativism, consciously got from Einstein and Freud, becomes the structure for *The Alexandria Quartet*. There is a good deal of tiresome lecturing on relativity, not only tiresome but stale, since it is repeating at second hand the discoveries of first-rate minds. The legitimate method is to let the actors perform in such a way as to show the theory embodied: to make it flesh, as fiction must. And to a certain extent this is done, but Darley as the first person point of view never resolves the meaning of all the action in the four books. He is the first person observer (who sometimes acts), whose mind receives images and sensations without reflection. When he becomes actor, he does reflect and report, but altogether within the immediate situation he finds himself involved in. Justine remains, at the end, disconnected shapes and images. So does Nessim. The relativity begets one illusion after another, but finally the reader surely can ask, what is the reality of this large and complex action?

Darley and Clea at the end of the fourth book find some solution, if not salvation; she as a painter and he as a writer, they hope. This is no more than some kind of ending of their personal involvement, not an intelligence resolving the complex matters of the action in all four books. The author no doubt meant it all to be relative. Whatever he meant, he asks the reader to do his final work for him, the pulling together of the separate parts into the one meaning. The author in the end should "know," as any creator knows, the entire truth about his creations. He as creator cannot be a relativist, even if he deals in relativity.

A writer who started out well, William Styron, has a recent book, *Set This House On Fire*, which could serve as an example for the failure of the first person view. It is a long, discursive book, and in the two hundred thousand words of impressions, much does not bear directly upon the action. The book's mechanical and formal structure is in two parts. The first person, Peter Leveret, a lawyer and youthful companion of the antago-

nist, Mason Flagg, should be the principal actor, since it presumably is his story; but actively it is only his story in the first part, and even here he is more of a commentator than actor. Cass Kinsolving, the painter who can't or won't paint, takes over in the second part; that is; he becomes the protagonist who acts and is changed by his acts. The only way the reader can accept the lawyer, Peter Leveret, as the protagonist is by restricting the author's meaning to the legal curiosity of solving a murder mystery.

But the author's intention is obviously more than this. The action seems to arise from the constant struggle the artist suffers, the conflict between his work and "life." Cass Kinsolving, who enters the action addicted to drink, falls into bondage to Flagg, whose person and possessions threaten the integrity of the painter as artist and man. To free himself and recover his self-respect he murders Flagg, who has raped a girl Kinsolving is sentimentally attached to and whom he thinks, mistakenly, Flagg has also murdered. This act of violence miraculously returns him to his manhood and profession, since Flagg had used his power to reduce the real artist to his own spurious level. So the murder becomes symbolic of self and artistic recovery in a literal sense: for drink, Kinsolving has painted a pornographic picture of the act of love, which he regrets and which he tears up as a sign of his release. Any violation of viewpoint or a drifting of it causes confusion in the reader's knowledge and sympathy. As well, it is often a sign of the author backing away from a seemingly insoluble problem. Such problems, if confronted, are the way into the true subject. Anybody with a narrative gift can tell some kind of a story: the successful artist tells the one story the circumstances and actors demand.

There are several technical failures which come from the shift of view when, in the second part, Leveret is not close enough to the action, and Kinsolving has to take over. To begin with, it is never clear why Kinsolving is addicted to drink. Nor can we believe his wife in the role she has to play. She appears like one of those characters a playwright leaves on the stage, mesmerized, until needed for a too-plotted appearance. At the height of the crisis, in a crowded house, she remains curiously hidden. As if the author felt her lack, he does earlier let her come to Flagg's

apartment and protest, but it is a protest we do not believe because we do not believe in her as a human being. And we must, because by not answering a letter, she loses the money which puts her husband into Flagg's hands. Such irresponsibility is known to exist, but the miraculous recovery from it which follows her husband's miraculous recovery of himself is hard to believe. Certainly murder takes on virtues we never dreamed of. But the great flaw in the book is Mason Flagg. He is another hero whose slogan is "sex, the last frontier." It is never clear what power he has over men and women; so easily triumphant no wonder he is a spoiled vicious nature, a leader of the movie set, the choral representative of spurious art. He is in both parts of the novel, but is treated from the outside and superficially. Probably Peter Leveret should have been dropped and the view put with Flagg, the antagonist. At any rate it is the author's failure to bring him alive in the full necessity of an evil, rather than vicious, force at work which is the failure of the book.

As this investigation continues, it is becoming clearer that "the impressionism of the ego" makes of the first person not an aesthetic procedure but a subjective fusion of subject and method, a kind of autobiography of the author's stream of consciousness, with little critical examination or restraint on his part. It is a cultural phenomenon and an artistic regression. An art is first of all selective, and that means frequent withdrawal for critical appraisal and revision from the stream of creating which holds tangential and diverting material that has to be thrown out. The impressionist of the ego seems to want to keep everything, whether it advances the action or not, keeping it worshipfully because it is a part of him. It follows that in this kind of fiction the author may dispense with decorum, convention, all the formal restraints and institutions by means of which society governs and recognizes itself. Even when the institutions and manners are recognized, they are treated frivolously or ridiculed, as limitations upon self-expression, the only truth. These writers make a grievous error, for there is in art no action without its proper form, nor, as norm, any uninhibited man in society. These writers rarely go to such extremes, but they go far enough to fall short of committing themselves absolutely to their material, and in treat-

ing it never risk failure in the adventure of the one comprehensive meaning for the action.

The first person can be skillfully used, when it conforms to a traditional attitude towards nature and society. A good example of this is a book by Albert Guerard which came out in 1950: *Night Journey*. Whereas Styron divides his novel mechanically into two parts, neither of which receives the control of a view (and this means the reader does not know quite with whom his sympathy should lie, or in which part the meaning more nearly may be discovered), the action of *Night Journey* takes place between two first persons, each one carrying on an interior monologue, the hero and his choral interpreter, who in alternating their voices make a dramatic dialogue which clearly advances the action toward its resolution. The resolution unites as it should the action and the enveloping action, giving the hero, Paul Haldan, a universal meaning as well as the meaning of his particular fate. As much as the other writers so far considered, Guerard confronts a shattered and changing society. But behind *Night Journey* is a civilized intelligence which renders the terror of Europe when the controls for action are no longer interrelated, and abstract ideas are the last expression of organized government. Ideas become propaganda, propaganda deliberate lies, out of which rises the hopeless cynicism which describes the condition of the state. This is the enveloping action: nothing is as it seems; the thread of belief has snapped; man wanders without direction over a terrain where war never stops, with the fog of war now the fog of all human action. When peace is war and war is peace, every institution and convention is distorted. The controlling image for the action is a civilian who is more military than the soldiers. He dresses as a civilian but carries himself like a Prussian. He comes into an army with orders from the highest command and so moves about out of any control, either from the military or civil authority. This is the ultimate confusion. To this has the state been reduced.

Paul Haldan, thrust into this situation with youthful hope of purpose, is attached to this concrete symbol of disorder and betrayal; he represents the night journey mankind must now take. Since Haldan remembers Europe in its civilized era, both the

action and the enveloping action are united in his dilemma and in his relationship to the controlling image. Not sex but the nullity of all desire threatens Europe. The first person operates both on the literal and symbolic level, and it delivers its meaning, which is not an autobiography of a consciousness but a consciously controlled rendition of the subject's complication, established upon an individual's conflict and illuminated by a choral effect, also concentrated upon an individual. If at times the monotony which describes the edge of the abyss affects the reader as well as the actors, it is the trap of the first person, even traditionally used.

If *Night Journey* suggests the true desolation which must follow the breaking of all forms and rules, annihilating the human capacity to be, making the egos in life as shadowy as the ghosts in the classical underworld, then *Under the Volcano* by Malcolm Lowry renders hell in the mind of one man, the Consul, as a condition of such exquisite agony that society impinges upon the struggling psyche of the hero with no more certainty than images seen through the poisoned vapors of the volcano. It does not matter whether this society is shattered or alien, the Consul is in exile and alone. His aloneness is the result of and the punishment for a mortal crime; it is Satan's condition when he was cast forth from the mind of God, that is from love, to the isolation of his own thoughts, which is hell. What is lacking in Miller and Durrell and Styron is a sense of evil. None of their characters suffer the consequences of their acts. Cass Kinsolving commits murder; yet, instead of being made to suffer either in his conscience or by the state, murder regenerates him. This is surely heresy. He remains perpetually drunk throughout the action; yet he acts more or less in control of himself. The only indication of drunkenness is in his sentimental relationship to the peasant girl and her father. We do not believe the depraved acts Flagg makes him perform before his guests, because he never seems drunk enough either before or after. This is again evidence of the failure of the chosen view. We are never close enough to the hero's inward plight.

I take Kinsolving for comparison, because both he and the Consul commit murder and remain drunk throughout the action. Kinsolving commits murder towards the end of the action; the

Consul before it begins. In other words the Consul's story depends upon what effect the murder has had upon him. We watch the process by which sin destroys a soul and how it suffers in hell. We don't know why the Consul put three German officers in the ship furnace; we are not quite sure he did it, but certainly he felt responsible, for there is no other explanation for the loss of love and his decline and self-damnation. His marriage failed, we must assume, because of his conscience and his pride; not from his wife's adultery which he drove her to, because it is she who loves, who comes back to him; and it is he who cannot repent and ask forgiveness, either of God or of man, that brings them both to their deaths. This is the action of the novel, the vestige of love which the Consul has for his wife struggles for, but does not achieve atonement. Pride triumphs. "The will of man," he says, "is unconquerable. Even God cannot conquer it." They both literally and symbolically die for their sins, wandering in the literal and metaphorical dark of the jungle path: he for murder, she for adultery. The horse is the occasion for his death; its flight actually kills her, the agency which his hand literally sent. The horse stands for the masculine intuition and instincts which may save but, out of control, destroy. It was this instinctive sense of their need for each other which brought Yvonne back to him; but it was too late. He was too far gone in drink and remorse and illusion and hatred. Salvation in the spasmodic rise of his need for love offered itself until he took to mescal, that drink which destroys the reason and with it reality.

As is often the case, that which saves can destroy. Yvonne, returning to reoffer her love, brings death instead. Her husband, the Consul, struggles to reunite with her; but as he says, he loves hell now, simply because in the state of his conscience, he is no longer free to love elsewhere. His sins have so isolated him that his communion can only be with his damnation. He has committed every mortal sin, and each is the doorway to hell, although he enters it first by the gluttony of drink, which he says is also food. Never crying *mea culpa* for his initial affront to God (that is, by taking life which only God may do), he substitutes for the actual world a state of continual and extreme intoxication, whose delirium is filled by the voices of his "familiars." This is his hell. His conscience intrudes but in an inverted way, so that all his acts

show the double betrayal of self and love. In moments of clarity he "flees for his life" not to a church but to a pulcheria. Everywhere he looks he finds another aspect of hell.

Nobody has shown so well the hell which is the flight from self, even to the quality of the style which is heavy and overweighted, as if to draw the reader there too. All the controlling images contain the pains and degradation of hell. The volcanoes give the physical sense of it. And they stand, also, for a mythical separation in marriage, as does Maximilian's broken palace, turned into an outdoor privy, among the ruins of which insects and mongrel dogs wander. Betrayal, the failure of marriage, madness find in the ruins the proper images. The Consul prays to the Virgin who describes his condition: "She is the Virgin for those who have nobody with." He asks to truly suffer; he asks for the return of his purity, the knowledge of the Mysteries that he has betrayed and lost. He asks that he may be truly lonely so that he may *honestly* pray. Then he asks "let us [he and Yvonne] be happy again . . . if it's only out of this terrible world. 'Destroy the world,' he said in his heart." The only thing that will destroy the world is love and that means the giving of self, which the Consul is no longer able to do. "No se puede vivir sin amar" is repeated, and again at the very end. All of the images match or suggest his betrayal and damnation. He alternately sips strychnine and whiskey, a way to sober up; but it fails because he takes it in excess, as he doesn't want to sober up. They are both aphrodisiacs which cancel each other out and contain, in excess, death. This symbolizes his plight and the end, as does the picture show where "Dark shapes of pariah dogs prowled in and out of the stalls. The lights were not entirely dead: they glimmered, a dim reddish orange, flickering" (like hell), the picture is a horror story with Peter Lorre, presenting a murderer who has an artist's hands. So has the Consul, who never finishes his book; his crime thwarts his true profession and hence his manhood. The action takes place on the day of the feast of the dead, whose meaning as ceremony and private grief divulges, by antithesis, the double nature of the Consul's crime: the betrayal of the state and of his marriage.

He and his wife and his brother Hugh (who has loved Yvonne) hold a last supper in a pulcheria, although unwittingly

but pertinently, in which love is travestied and addressed obscenely, and subverted by salacious and vulgar punning. The main dish is "the spectral chicken of the house." This is the beginning of the end, and the end comes with the literal and figurative diverging of the paths, in his last flight. If Yvonne and Hugh had taken the right instead of the left fork, they would have overtaken the Consul; they might have rescued him, but it is more likely that they would have postponed to another occasion his death and the final damnation, for the action of this story is the perpetual re-losing of the earthly paradise. I suppose the action hangs upon betrayal, the enveloping action, death which came into the world at the original fall. Death's images match the images of life which struggle to oppose it, but the dead ones predominate, as drink in the Consul's mind turns into the fumes of hell and the loss of hope. "How indeed could he hope to find himself, to begin again when, somewhere, in one of those lost or broken bottles, in one of those glasses, lay, forever, the solitary clue to his identity?" The nature of his original crime is lost in the severity of the punishment for it.

At Parián his spiritual and moral crimes create their physical counterparts in the actual world. Here he recovers Yvonne's lost love letters (lost when drunk, drunkenness, however, being the mere occasion). These letters in all humility and grace and longing offer the soalce of love and life and salvation to them both. His first thought is that she has been reading some good stylist. The last chapter opens with his order for mescal. This gives the image and direction of the final act. He allows himself to be manhandled, his person to be rifled (her letters are taken from him). His money is stolen; he is mocked; he is covered with the slime of pimps, criminal police, subversives, since it is they who should keep order. His will which he boasted even God could not conquer is now at the mercy of criminals and criminal suggestion. He is led off by and commits the act of lust with a whore, while the pimp watches. He looks up, and a picture of Canada on a calendar confronts him. It was here that Yvonne had planned their new life, in a kind of physical paradise. To see it on a calendar marking time makes the final twist of irony. He knows now all is lost, that he can never return to his wife, because the act he has committed is the final affront to and denial of love,

without which one cannot live. After this he quickly comes to his physical death, but not until the hell where all the deadly sins take shape among the various criminals, hags, subhuman individuals who surround and taunt him, or try to warn of what will follow. He is now beyond shame, dignity, feeling, even beyond all that is done to him here. He is already dead when the representative of law and order, now a murderer and outlaw, shoots him down with malice. His death repeats in parody his own act with the German prisoners, the public and private violation which cast him out of the world into the symbolic volcano, a ravine into which a dead dog is thrown after him. At the end, from the third person of a roving narrator, the author steps forward and prints on the page opposite the end:

Le Gusta este Jardin
Que es suyo?
Evite que sus hijos lo Destruyan!

The excellencies and native talents of these writers must be taken for granted—these writers whose performance has been impaired by the Ego. This Ego represents a cultural disorder which should be used by, instead of use, the first person point of view. The material is incompletely controlled, therefore, and the decline of impressionism is witnessed. The invisible form which resides within the mind does not realize itself substantially at the post; nor, in Lubbock's words, do the form and content mutually use each other up. The third person, James's central intelligence, promises to the reader the author's self-containment, his artificial presence instead of his personal being. Specifically in the light of the argument here, it means that when the author has to intrude, he should do so invisibly and exit the same way, leaving no evidence of himself except in the changes he has wrought, and in his irony.

There is one other thing to add. The stream of consciousness when used by this imperfect Ego, masquerading as a point of view, makes the action more imperfect by the intensity this use of consciousness gives to the action. There must be some hone, some point of objective reference, some measure for this interior flow; usually this is the secular world. But it need not be just this.

Without objectivity the consciousness reveals itself as too private. *To a Lighthouse* is an example. Claude Simon, who has been influenced by Faulkner, keeps his sentences vital and clear for pages, with an astute handling of punctuation; however, the affective intensities of his heroes and heroines make them incomplete. This is because of a disproportion of feeling and reflection to what is actually happening. Again it is the first person, but this time the first person lost in the stream of consciousness. Faulkner used this view, but only as one tool among many which the fictive inheritance offered. Of course we must never forget that execution shares in the imperfections of our mortality; but the post must achieve a disentanglement, so sight and insight can be distinguished and measured and fused.



“The Open Boat”: A Pagan Tale

THE SINKING of the *Commodore* is the only instance I know which allows for a strict comparison between journalism (even in Eliot's sense) and fiction. After his rescue Crane wrote for the press, along with the Captain and others, his own story of the disaster. It is good; it is the best of journalism, but it is not fiction; nor was it meant to be. This was to come later in “The Open Boat,” certainly one of the finest works of its kind in the language. We have, then, the perfect exemplum of reporting and rendition of the fact of disaster at sea. As Crane says beneath the title of “The Open Boat,” it is after the fact. All of the difference is in this statement. After the fact there is time for reflection, distance, and out of the act itself the growth of meaning. The immediate report of disaster is always too sensational and, as journalism, of necessity too hurried, too involved in the moment, too dependent upon cliches and the choice of the obvious in violence and sentiment. For example, in “Stephen Crane's Own

Story" written shortly after his rescue, the loading of the ammunition and bundles of rifles is presented in this way: the hatch is like the mouth of a monster, "the feeding time of some legendary beast." This comparison is strained. It blurs the picture and diverts the reader, for no conceit is strong enough to add anything to a function whose literal meaning or performance also contains its symbolic meaning. The rifles and ammunition are themselves the agencies of death, their violence momentarily hidden as they actually are being hidden within the hold. Later we will find that the beast, after the fact, discovered its true relationship in the fiction. In the New York press the hatch as monster is after the fact in the wrong way. Crane is with false artifice giving a foreboding of disaster. There are other incidences of this, such as the cook's feeling in his bones, the helmsman's intention not to go filibustering again, in spite of the good pay, the ship's running aground twice. The details which describe the sinking are accurate and theatrical. They all have to do with the report giving the illusion of an act. The report does have the drama of a shipwreck at sea, but the actors lack humanity, since it is the general fright, not the individual responding, which the newspaper reader is meant to receive. Except in a disaster so great that everybody is forced to feel a personal involvement or threat, the news story insulates the reader from life. The generalized report never gives him the sense of having observed but rather of receiving a rumor, the details of which are not quite to be believed. The reader's position is always that of the stranger, the uninvolved. Rarely does he feel: There but for the grace of God go I. When the first mate jumps to his death, we see him begin his flight, but we do not feel him hit the water. Crane has to interpret this for us. On the other hand, in fiction there is always a chorus, or what stands for a chorus, the enveloping action. This holds some essential archetypal explanation of experience, of which the action is one example. The sympathy between the reader, then, and the protagonist involves the reader and lifts him from the accidents of life into some phase and understanding of the essence of things. This is why the best of fiction stands to last and the news story disappears with the paper it is printed on. There is one instance in "Stephen Cranes' Own Story" which puts side by side the report and the rendition

of fiction. When the crazed Negro stevedore pulls the towing boat towards the raft, we are told he "had turned into a demon. He was wild—wild as a tiger," vague and time-worn figures of speech for the threat of irrational force. But "his eyes were almost white" is fiction. This is not only accurate observation, it is also selection of the one detail which reveals the wild animal fright of brute strength usurping manhood. The pulling on the rope is the physical and outward sign of this inward chaos. The pupil, which focuses what is rational in man, is closed or lost. And loss of control, the loss of reason before the threat of death is actual with the stevedore, but it is a surrender possible for all here engaged. Under the strain the yellow eyeball seems or becomes white. It is as unfocused as chaos. It is the concrete instance, physical appearance, and moral and mental loss combined, of that which in man equals the unruly waters.

Journalism in Crane's day was closer to fiction than it is now. The mechanical formulae of platitude as the norm would not come for another generation or so; so that at its best, as it is in "Stephen Crane's Own Story," the news story has at times the same authority as fiction. But the reader must wait for "The Open Boat" to know what it is to be at sea, to be within six inches of death minute by minute, at the height of a storm which lasts for thirty hours. Of course there is the obvious suspense: will the men get ashore? But this is merely the statement of a desired end; it is not the action itself. The shipwrecked, except at intervals, are not involved with rescue (this is their concern, of course); they are involved, to use Arthurian terms, with the dolorous quest, unconsciously, nevertheless truly; and this enforced quest becomes ignorance changed into knowledge and especially self-knowledge before a continuing precarious plight. This is the way in which the ordinary man becomes a hero or fails in manhood. With the frail support of a ten-foot dinghy four men, the injured captain, the cook, the oiler, and the one alien to the sea, the correspondent, confront the ocean (the elemental) at its most destructive phase. Without water there can be no life, but that which is benign and sustaining is merely one part of the dualism which holds in reserve, for its own mysterious reasons, the opposite or destructive power. Such is the course of learning these men are forced to undertake. They are at the mercy of one

element, but they are affected by all four; to say four is to say the elements are pagan. The outcome of the action will show whether the cosmos to the shipwrecked is pagan and whether they so view it.

Four elements, four men in the boat who comprise the basic qualities of men acting as men. We begin with this. The captain is the legal and moral authority; he is the sovereign power. The cook is the one who attends to and satisfies appetite. The oiler has all of the craftsmanship and deep knowledge of the sea; he is the one who can make a thing work or go, and it is these qualities as expressions of his character which allow the captain, by ordering them, to bring the men to shore. It is also these qualities which make of him and not the captain the hero-victim. The correspondent is the outsider and so is better able to interpret what takes place. But particularly he is the man of words; and it is by means of words, artfully employed, that actions are most fully known. For these reasons the point of view must lie with him. We have a definite clue. He wonders why he is there, and to wonder is the beginning of knowledge. He enters the minds of all, but he is an actor, too, and finds himself most identified with the oiler. He is the twin and counterpart, but the articulate and imaginative part of the oiler, who only does.

Each of the men is, in a way, the protagonist, for each by his office (not personally) represents an intrinsic part of man. These parts must be seen not as allegory but as offices; that is, the man of appetite is a cook; sovereignty is specified by what it means to be a captain of a ship, not of infantry. But it is the correspondent who is the actual protagonist, for he is changed by the action. The others are there to be interpreted by him in the course of his learning. They are real but in a sense become his creatures. He is writing the story after the fact, to understand the experience and what it has done for him, which he cannot know unless he knows the others in their roles. Only fiction can do this, since facts are elusive and require a point of view and an imagination to fit them together. “The Open Boat” being fiction, Crane is not himself either but his own creature, along with the companions in sorrow.

The action opens not with the melodramatic incident of the crazed stevedore but with the now famous sentence, “None of

them knew the color of the sky." Here is a simple sentence; yet it is mysterious. What it holds is the essence of the action: the kernel. It is the felt weight of this which induces the mystery and establishes in the first sentence the suspense and tone which will be maintained. This sense of the conflict can only be felt, because it takes the long middle and the shock at the end to fuse together the entire meaning at a specific moment. And this moment of course closes the action. A story whose opening lacks this feeling of weight, of a revelation about to be illumined, will be discursive and suggestive rather than intrinsic and absolute. The shipwrecked do not know the color of the sky, because to remove their eyes for an instant from the mountainous waves will swamp the boat. Nor can they remove their eyes: they are fixed by the threat and object of death. As in any crisis of violence man, by being immersed, can act only out of his instincts and reflexes. These men we are told know all the colors of the sea; that is, they have the particular knowledge of the ways of the sea. But being so caught up, they cannot use it. They are virtually in this beginning in a state of ignorance. Meaning develops as they suffer and learn.

The author's most urgent technical problem must have been the kind of comparisons to make. To use only pictures of the sea and its effects upon them would have produced monotony. No element in the natural world is finally isolated. Where there is the sea, there is the sky above which holds the breath of life and, as the winds blow it, the threat of death. Fire at sea is a harder matter, since it is the opposite of water and only in alchemy can conjoin with it. But there are the stars, the lights in the night, the streak of phosphorus. Once water is a spread of white flames. But the images most used are from the land. The sea and the land contain the conflict, the threat of annihilation and the hope of salvation. It is towards the land their desperate eyes most often turn. Can they free themselves of the waves and safely come to shore? In "Stephen Crane's Own Story," when trying to launch a life-boat, he compares their effort to that of moving a brick schoolhouse. Either instinctively or consciously here he got the substance of his structure. In their peril the land could only seem safe, kind, and longed-for, but this is only half its meaning. In their desperation they, at first, ignore what is hidden.

Because the eye is in the moving boat, the horizon narrows and widens, dips and rises, in fact refuses to make of the landfall a fixed and stable place. The motion of the sea dominates. All things, including the land, are liquid and threatening. Nowhere in the universe does there seem to be a firm place to stand. The waves are thrust up in points like rocks. To be tossed upon rocks is to be spitted; to be rolled in the breakers may be to drown. The threat of the waves is thus reenforced by something equally dangerous on the land. The entire paragraph gives us the shipwrecked in an almost hopeless condition, just after the ship goes down. The next paragraph says that a man ought to have a bath tub larger than the boat which here rides upon the sea. The tub, misplaced in the ocean, because of its misplacement makes visual the immensity of the ocean, the fragility of the dinghy, and the slight chance of survival. And what could be more opposite to what is happening to them than the safe luxury of a warm tub behind a locked door.

These seemingly contradictory effects follow throughout, but particularly in the first two parts. The boat is a bucking bronco. As the wave approaches, the little boat rises for it like a horse taking a fence outrageously high. It rides down the slaty wall of water, which seems the final outburst of the ocean. The waves have a terrible grace and they come in silence, "save for the snarling of the crests." Silence against the sound of the crests makes the reader both see and hear in the wave the threat of the ocean. Not only has he here in the way no one can doubt brought together sound and silence, exact opposites; but he further enlarges the effect by yoking together things ordinarily never compared, and he does this by what they have in common, terror. The slaty wall is an actual terror in itself, but the terrible grace and the snarling implies the beast crouching or springing. The tiger of the news story takes on now its proper effect. And further the land is no longer the simple hope for refuge. The men are still caught up. They do not notice the changing of the hours; their faces are gray in the wan light of breaking day; they are still unable to be aware of anything more than the sea colors changing from slate to emerald green (the foam tumbles like snow). Against the elemental forces, to view the men at dawn, the author makes a violent shift of view. He puts it in a balcony, as if the

spectator were comfortably watching a melodrama, something "wierdly picturesque." This is so removed from the actual predicament as to imply an indifference to their fate, to make it unreal. It is almost as if they were already dead. At least the unreality of a view from a balcony makes of the land, their hope of refuge, a place not to be believed in. Now, against the sea and those threats from the land similar both in kind and appearance to the sea, the author places a short dialogue between the cook and the correspondent. In spite of the fuller knowledge of what the land holds for these shipwrecked men, for the moment hidden in the enveloping comparisons, they can only see the shore as a good. The cook speaks hopefully of a house of refuge as being near. In his anxiety he confuses it with a life-saving station. The correspondent corrects him. They contradict each other; that is, they argue about a hypothetical situation. The oiler, the seaman, returns them to reality. "We're not there yet," he says.

These sea-land comparisons contain both the enveloping action, or the conditions forever constant upon the human and natural scene, and the action itself. In this short dialogue the action begins to withdraw from that which envelops it, begins to specify, although it does not yet make clear the fullness of what is amorphous. This withdrawal is never a severance. It merely gives shape to that which is hidden but everpresent. It is as old as the fall of man, since man falling into his predicament always falls into his original plight, a plight, though unique, common to all. The individual conflict is the only way to show their common predicament. The fear of death is an abstraction until it withdraws from the general into a particular affect. The sense of fear may be in a group, but each member will feel it according to his capacity. The artist manages to make this apparent by the use of his various tools, the most important of which is the sensibility. Its five parts make the word flesh.

Parts two and three continue and emphasize the ambiguity which relates land to sea, only now the action begins more and more to show it. The crest of the waves suggests a hill, not mountains of water, high and formidable but not impossible to mount. The danger seems less present than the snarling beast, although the situation remains precarious. Canton flannel (soft for babies and croup) gulls fly about them. They sit down upon

the water, before the men, as at home as prairie chickens a thousand miles inland. They sit near patches of sea weed which undulate like carpets in a gale. All these domestic comparisons of comfort and safety converge through the gulls and then through one gull into the action itself. They make a particular effect. They stare at the men with black bead-like eyes. Their unblinking scrutiny seems uncanny and sinister. The occupants of the boat hoot at them. The one gull threatens by side-long jumps in the air, "chicken-fashion," to roost upon the captain's head. The captain would like to knock it in the head with a painter, but he waves it gently away and carefully. This enforced restraint brings to a point the six inches of gunwale and the turbulent waters, immediate and threatening.

The overwhelming, absolute threat of death which the mountains of water pose in the beginning remains, but in a state of suspension. It becomes the shape of their predicament. The senses begin to work and make the feelings of the four, their responses to particular objects, carry the increasing tensions of the conflict as it moves inevitably toward the climax. The cook bails, the captain directs, the correspondent and the oiler row, sometimes together, sometimes separately, and the care with which the rowers change places compares them to Dresden figurines. And then he who is relieved is no longer china. He drops into the cold water of the boat and is instantly asleep. Touch and sight show the menace of growing fatigue. Their waning strength is thus opposed to the tireless waves. In the beginning the oars seem too frail. Any moment the weight of water may snap them in two and thus doom the boat, but towards the end they are as heavy as lead. This different use of touch measures the time at sea and the mounting fatigue which diminishes their chances of escape. To say that men are tired does not show them so, but the changing weight of the oars does. Nor can statement make time pass either. But time is very important. It is another measure of the men's resistance. It is rendered in various ways, but sight, the sovereign sense, is sharpened upon a small still thing in the moving horizon. This is the lighthouse at Mosquito Inlet and nobody can see it at first but the captain, he whose attention is ever alert. Indistinctly this grows from a pin point, out of a long black shadow upon the sea, until it is an upright shadow upon the sky: substances of hope

but insubstantial to sight, matter yet not matter. The horizon still moves; substance cannot be relied upon. However, sea weed imitating earth tells them they are making progress towards land.

We now approach the long middle. The fury of the sea has decreased, but only so far as to allow the shipwrecked to be consciously aware of the danger, to assess their chances. They have been cast away not in the pink of condition but overworked and hungry, and the captain has a broken arm. The men strain almost to the verge of collapse, but the captain by some stratagem, each time, prolongs the struggle. As he hangs over the water jar, he hears and sees and inwardly interprets the particularities, the quality of the threats; so that in each command quietly given, he speaks with his proper authority and adds to this the great moral force of knowledge they all now begin to acquire. Sometimes he has them hoist his overcoat on an oar for sail, at times he has the cook make of an oar a rudder, so that both the oiler and the correspondent can rest together. Even when the boat capsizes and they are in the surf, he speaks above its roar and instructs the cook and the correspondent.

But as the land slowly rises out of the sea and the lighthouse rears high, the captain himself voices their suppressed fear. Even he confuses the house of refuge (which doesn't exist) with the life-saving station (which is twenty miles away). Their irrational state of mind, where rescue is concerned, finds its expression in denying the facts. To accept the facts just then would bring them to despair, so great is their stress and so inadequate their means for survival. But there comes a respite. The land continues to rise beautifully out of the sea. Another sense now is used: sound. They hear the low thunder of the surf: the threat of death and the hope of salvation, just where the black line of the sea and the white of sand join, that border they must pass over and which now is fixed in their sight. The wind has changed, but their moment seems to be upon them. They grow cheerful, find cigars and matches. "Everybody took a drink of water."

But it is a false hope. The house the captain has seen as the house of refuge or life-saving station is just a house in a summer resort. They are forced to abandon the false illusion which

unspoken fear established in their minds as fact. The surf though far away sounds thunderous and mighty. The captain is the first to confront the reality again, which is that if they are to be saved, they will have to do it themselves and presently, for "if we stay out here too long, we'll none of us have the strength left to swim after the boat swamps." They willingly face up to the enemy, and with understanding, not complete but sufficient for the moment. They exchange addresses, with constraint accepting the possibility of death. This is a kind of moral triumph before the obvious dangers at that place where land and water meet.

It is at this time that the correspondent, in interpreting for all, uses a rhetorical language which seems to violate the established tone. "If I am going to be drowned—if I am going to be drowned—if I am going to be drowned, why, in the name of the seven mad gods who rule the sea, was I allowed to come thus far and contemplate sand and trees? . . . my nose dragged away as I was about to nibble the sacred cheese of life? . . . If this old ninny-woman Fate cannot do better than this, she should be deprived of the management of men's fortunes. . . ." and it goes on. Actually there is no violation. This is one of the correspondent's voices. The false rhetoric is a part of the professional cynicism of journalism which views all appearance as false or suspect. It is not even a pretense to belief, for the gods here invoked are pagan gods the correspondent no more believes in than he believes in the Christian order of Heaven. He who was taught to be cynical of men does believe in and knows at the time that the fellowship with the other men in the boat would be the best experience of his life. This feeling of comradeship discovered for the correspondent his own humanity, but he is not yet fully saved, not so long as he uses the falsely pagan figures of speech. To be half-saved on this quest is to ask for further trials. And this is exactly what the ocean and the doubtful shore have yet to give.

As they draw nigh to land, it is seen the billows will surely swamp the boat. The oiler announces the dinghy won't live three more minutes and asks the captain to let him take it to sea again. It takes supreme skill to execute this. The oiler rows them back into their predicament, towards the desolate orient and a squall marked by clouds "brick-red like smoke from a burning build-

ing." Moral fatigue as well as physical shows in the collapse of the rower into the cold sea-water sloshing to and fro in the bottom of the boat, being drenched without being awakened, within an inch of the waves, into which, if the boat should capsize, he would have "tumbled comfortably out upon the ocean as if he felt sure it was a great soft mattress." This is a small climax of the ambiguity in the land-sea images. The castaways' bitter retreat is made poignant by seeing a man on shore waving his coat. Other men arrive. But what a distance between those at sea and those on land. All the possibilities of rescue pass before those in the dinghy, but the men on land are as helpless to help as they are to receive it. When the four realize this, and also realize that they must spend a night upon the ocean, they revile those on shore and particularly the one waving his coat. The coat is a message of sympathy, but the night closing down makes the land seem hostile. After the land has vanished but not the low drear thunder of the surf, the correspondent berates the pagan gods about his possibility of drowning. But this time he speaks only about a third as much. This lessening of his use of such rhetoric is a clue to the meaning of its function.

They now literally enter the night sea journey. The oarsman can barely see the tall black waves. The rest lie heavily and listlessly in the boat. The captain droops over the water jar, but he still commands, saying, "Keep her head up," when the oarsman falters. The long strain has made the cook indifferent to danger. He withdraws into a dream of food. He asks what kind of pie the oiler likes best. The man whose office it is to attend to the appetite of others now expresses his longing for shore in dreams of his own. This is the only time the oiler becomes agitated. To the correspondent the mention of food brings to mind no "cheese" of life but its very bread. They are made to suffer twice over, in their physical need and the land's comforts which the mention of food makes them so keenly aware of.

Throughout the night the oiler and the correspondent exchange places, each rowing after he is no longer able to row. And then in the deep reaches of the night the correspondent is left alone with the full responsibility of his office, for even the captain, he thinks, is asleep. We now approach the climax for all,

and for the protagonist the long dark night at sea becomes the dark night of the soul. The correspondent is to be isolated, until he feels himself the one man afloat upon all the oceans, so that the "wind's voice is sadder than the end." There remains this night nothing to sustain him but himself. Before the complex mystery which surrounds him, he begins to change, finding his cynicism no help for what confronts him. The boat is so small that the men touch, their feet reaching under the sea even to the captain. They exist almost as one body, under the pressures of their predicament. But the correspondent does not share this, for he alone is conscious. Fire is the appropriate element to illuminate his predicament. There are two lights, one to the north and one to the south. "The two lights were the furniture of the world." This expresses his aloneness, but the shark trailing its prosphorus suggests death, although its light is harmless. Then there are the stars. All of these exempla of fire, because they are remote and cannot immediately affect him, either for good or ill, represent his confinement to himself. This is his trial, and he accepts it as he leans over the boat and swears softly into the sea.

During the rest of the night, the management of the boat requires the others to take their parts with him. He returns to them changed. Part six opens with "If I am going to be drowned . . ." but the rhetoric fails him. The complaint is very short. The indifference of Fate makes him say but "I love myself." At once he is presented with the vanity of this. His rebellion, the lack of a temple to pelt with brick, quickly declines into a pathos and knowledge of any man's supreme insignificance. "A high cold star on a winter's night is the word" he feels that she [nature] says to him. This is the point of change for him. The star is so remote it might be the core and shine of eternity, and nothing at this moment could so reduce him or make him suffer the humility without which no man is reborn. To make it concrete, out of his unconscious suddenly he is hearing a verse he had forgotten. As a child it had meant no more to him than a pencil point breaking. Like the ninny-woman Fate it belongs to a foreign world. Through his changing sense of himself, it now becomes present, no longer foreign but a local instance, as is his suffering, of the universal predicament of mankind, everywhere

beset and tried by those forces of nature (for so far does he see) everywhere about, lying in wait to try and judge the spirit and resistance of man.

A soldier of the Legion lay dying in Algiers;
There was lack of woman's nursing, there was dearth of
woman's tears;
But a comrade stood beside him, and he took that comrade's
hand,
And he said, "I never more shall see my own, my native land."

Out of the isolation of himself from all living creatures, before the point of eternity and in the presence of death (the shark), the correspondent is able to transform sound into sight (the rhythm of the verse into visual images), and out of this combine all the senses into a belief in and apprehension of a real soldier dying in the sands of Algiers. These sands become more real than the real sands before him by a kind of reversal, as he is purged of false rhetoric. The word becomes itself, and out of sorrow for himself has grown a compassionate sympathy for all. This is the measure of the extremity of his change. But even yet he does not understand it. The danger of the waves and the shut-in night does not allow him time for contemplation. He largely feels as much as exhausted muscle and attention will allow. But when morning breaks and it is clear no help is coming and the captain decides to run the surf, then nature to the correspondent (and he speaks for all) seemed neither cruel, nor wise, nor beneficent, nor treacherous—merely indifferent.

The sense of this represents the purgation of "fine" language and the illusion of false aid. There is nowhere a subterfuge for reality, the approaching crisis which in an instant will be death or salvation. The third great wave swamps the boat and they tumble into the January water; but the warning of that from which they must turn away but, whatever the outcome, must face, comes to the correspondent as the waters from the second wave tumble into the boat. His hands were on the thwarts. He quickly withdraws them as if he were afraid of wetting his fingers, he who has been sleeping in water, been saturated by it, and from the extremity of his fatigue would have rolled into it as upon a soft mattress. I suppose, in fiction, the sense of touch has never

been so well used, nor can one find so rare an example of the authority of rendition over that of statement. The nerves, in prostration, reach that exquisite feeling which brings to touch its euphoria and the falling away from this exquisite feeling into the listlessness of no response. Physically, then, the nerve ends, having reached this condition, a condition where water is felt as fire (one feels this in the quick withdrawal) represent the transcendence of fatigue, the weapon of the sea against the shipwrecked, who will now enter the water with only the resistance their separate persons in the mystery of their spirits may show. Also in this touch is the final concentration of the unspoken fear of death, of hope and despair, also unspoken but revealed in full by this action, a repugnance for their condition and for nature, the four elements, and the final denial of any pathetic fallacy. Once in the water the shore seems like scenery upon a stage. Although almost in reach and touch, to turn at this moment the real shoreline into an artificial setting for entertainment is an irony almost too finely drawn; it also sustains by the imagination what touch has done for the flesh. By now we feel all the false rhetoric has been strained away. The correspondent says simply, in the wonder of an innocent, "I am going to be drowned? Can it be possible? Can it be possible?" His isolation from himself is his conquest over self. He is now ready for the final act and understanding.

The captain in the water, holding on to the boat, still gives directions above the mighty noise of the surf. The cook in a life preserver is ordered to turn on his back and use the oar. The oiler needs no direction. He swims rapidly towards land, ahead in the race, as if he had suffered no fatigue; but the correspondent is ordered to come to the boat, when a wave lifts him and carries him completely over it to waters in which he can stand, but only for an instant. So fine a hair is drawn in his fate, which is settled by a man on shore running, shedding his clothes until he is naked as upon the first day, as the natural man free of all inhibiting social conventions. He drags the cook ashore; the captain still in his office of authority directs him next to the correspondent whom he pulls by the hand. Suddenly the man cries "What's that?" The correspondent says, "Go."

It is the oiler, in the shallows, face down. His head touches,

between each wave, the sand. The two elements of water and earth are now brought together in their complete meaning. The ambiguity of life-death is resolved in the oiler's body. And in human terms, sustaining the elemental, the dead body of the oiler and the live naked body of the man from the shore, whose charitable love saves some of them, represent life and death which the shoreline holds, the one aspect the forbidding and the other the hopeful. If the irony, however, becomes final in the oiler's body, the paradox remains to the end: one dies, the others live. The one most knowledgable of the sea, who has brought the others to safety, cannot save himself. Both life and death are here, but only after a respite does the correspondent, speaking for the survivors and perhaps for the dead, receive the full impact of learning. "When it came night, the white waves paced to and fro in the moonlight, and the wind brought the sound of the great sea's voice to the men on shore, and they felt that they could then be interpreters." From the ignorance of the first line, "None of them knew the color of the sky," the ignorance of absolute action, they now have graduated into the knowledge of the possibilities of all experience; that is, they can now interpret, at last, what has happened to them and what, therefore, can happen to all men. Like a destructive beast nature is always lying in wait to undo mankind. The elements may be indifferent but the mysterious, fateful circumstance depending upon the supernatural can save or destroy. Those who escape and those who fall define a mystery. The oiler is there for proof. And from the wind the sea carries to the men on shore this message. The basic element of life, air without which we cannot live, is the agency of the final mystery. Earth and water are forever present, the physical grounds for action, but the air in its physical and symbolic meaning carries the final authority of knowledge, the conditions of man in life and in the presence of the supernatural. The shipwrecked understand now the price of things as well as the mystery. They know one does not earn his life once and for all, for the beast remains in ambush, whether at sea or on land or within the human heart, pacing to and fro. Although the natural man, the innocent man, (he does not know or care whether he has clothes on or not) loves his neighbor as himself and shines like a saint (angel), the ending does not necessarily show them all

turned Christians. They in this knowledge which is experience may still be pagan. Their learning could be in the limits of stoicism. This kind of withdrawal of ignorance could be the answer to the mystery they have suffered. But it seems more likely that the correspondent who entered this adventure cynically now crowns his learning and change with a Christian image, even though he may have reached only the threshhold of faith, such as the early Christians knew. Perhaps it is this which makes them all feel, as the correspondent interprets for them, “that they could then be interpreters.”



The Displaced Family

MR. TAYLOR is the only American writer, and indeed to my knowledge the only writer in English, whose subject is the dislocation and slow destruction of the family as an institution.¹ He has fixed upon the one fact central to the social revolution going on in this country; how far it involves the rest of the western world is not immediately relevant. It is relevant that Mr. Taylor is a Southern writer, or better still from the border state of Tennessee, which gives him a distinct perspective upon the historical situation, and defines the aesthetic distance of his point of view. Nowhere else in this country is the family as a social unit so clearly defined as in the South. Its large "connections" amplifying the individual family life, the geographic accident which allowed the family in this greater sense (it was the

¹ The three works discussed in this essay are: *Tennessee Day in St. Louis* by Peter Taylor, *The Homecoming Game* by Howard Nemerov, and *Sojourn of a Stranger* by Walter Sullivan.

community) to extend itself in a mild climate and alluvial soils where the physical barriers were not too severe, and slavery too, gave the family a more clear definition of its function as not only an institution but *the institution of Southern life*. So it was elsewhere in the country but never quite so clearly evident. In the succeeding wests the constant movement impaired its stability. In New England, at least in the coastal areas, there was always the sea to intervene, keeping its mind colonial and spiritually dependent upon England, holding up a distant image and not the immediate one of a constant scene such as land allows. Both the sea and land are feminine images, but the sea takes only men; and so the communion between husband and wife is disrupted. When you think of woman in New England's past, witch-hunting comes to mind; in the South, and the matriarch shows herself. Land keeps the family intact. Husband, wife, children, the old, middle and young generations, all serve it and are kept by it, according to their various needs and capacities. The parts of the family make a whole by their diversity. The military defeat of the South, which was total in the sense of its structural overthrow and the acceptance of this, gives the writer a ground of comparison for the changes this defeat brought about. Most Southern writers of necessity must be aware of this. None has so clearly made fine stories out of it as has Mr. Taylor. However, he merely implies the more stable situation of the family on the land in dealing with its predicament in town and city. *Exiled at home* might best describe Mr. Taylor's earlier stories. In *Tennessee Day in St. Louis* the exile is actual, as it is in most of the stories in *The Widows of Thornton*.

Families from other parts of the country, when they move, identify themselves most readily with their new surroundings. The Southern family, like Lot's wife, turns back its head. The Tolliver household is the archetype of such a family. There are no heroes. The actors are all decent human beings caught in the situation of trying to maintain in absentia manners and mores which do not express their economic habits. The house has for its self-invited guest a former Senator who will be the speaker at the annual *Tennessee Day in St. Louis*. It is also the birthday of Lanny, the youngest son of the house, as well as the anniversary of the parents, James and Helen. The family, as the curtain rises,

discovers itself at a moment when both its public and private ceremonies happen upon the same day. Formerly, at "home," this would have seemed a happy occasion to combine the rituals of hospitality, birth, and the public thing. But the play opens in a different way. The *fîcîelles* describe a conflict between the public and the private ritual. The Senator has taken over the whole lower floor of the house, "evicting" the family while he memorizes his speech. But he has not been able to have it alone. Auntie Bet and Flo Dear, a rich old maid and her companion, defy the Senator by remaining downstairs working at a puzzle. They all have one thing in common: they are all self-invited. The ladies, however, have made themselves a part of the household; yet they feel insecure; the Senator, a temporary guest as they once were, threatens their place. The "connections," instead of working at and adding to the common occasion, jealously and selfishly find themselves at odds, if in the most civil fashion.

This competition between the public and private thing descends to a conflict within the privacy itself upon the entrance of James, the head of the house. He comes in as if he were intruding in his own home and hides his gift for Lanny, even locks it up. The reason given is that the Senator must not be made to feel his intrusion at such a time, and so the birthday is concealed. This is certainly a strain of manners, but it is more than that. If the Senator's kinship were true in the old sense, there would be no need for a guilty suppression of a private celebration. The guilt lies in the fact that there is nothing to be private about. The family is a husk, committed to keeping up the appearance of what a family is. The meaning of this shows in the father's gift, golf clubs which he loves and his son hates, as he does all games, preferring history and literature. The gift should represent love for the child in the occasion: it represents instead self-love and appearance. With ruthless insistence the family holds to this.

The family in a Christian society has only one function, to operate as a family and perpetuate itself through its children. Each member is called upon to deny much of his individual nature in the service of the whole, and this service sustains the common love and life. But the service must rest upon domestic laws, the principal one of disciplining children and servants, if

there be servants. This discipline is entirely lacking in the Tolliver house. Love becomes selfish, self-indulgent, and destructive; that is, irresponsible. William, Helen's brother, invites himself to the house, lives in it without paying his part; but the essential truth about William is that he rebelled against the family and its discipline back in Tennessee, because that discipline seemed harsh. It seemed harsh because the family had lost its meaning for itself and the South. Lanny quotes the old Senator to Lucy: ". . . there is no new South; there is only the old South resurrected with the print of the nails in her hands." Lucy supports her parents but flees their poverty. The Senator, who is more nearly the protagonist, came to manhood during Reconstruction, and has a historic perspective upon the situation. He suffered more immediately the family's dislocation, because he had been brought up in the real thing. He comes to St. Louis to sponge on the exiles, "to enjoy all the familiar patterns . . . without any of the responsibility," where the kin are not too close for comfort. His self-indulgence is food and drink and comfort. All the actors recognize in moments of insight what is wrong, but they usually see the failure in others. To their own shortcomings they are blind or fatally committed. It is their need for family life which makes them see; it is the self-indulgence and self-interest which makes this insight blurred.

The Senator, as he gulps his host's whiskey (Jack Daniels, Tennessee whiskey), compares St. Louis families of Tennessee extraction to the colony of Virginians who, caught by the Civil War in Paris, became the favorites of the French Court. But James Tolliver is more realistic: he replies that the men came to St. Louis of their own free will to make money in shoes, banking and insurance. But James refuses to understand the full meaning of this in terms of the ex-Tennesseans' plight in that border city with the Southern face. What he fails to understand is that these businessmen have substituted the means for the end, that is, money, not as a part of the family's economy, but as the *end* itself. Money, not the *res publica*, nor the American Union, is now the common American dream, as earlier the Union, an abstraction, had supplanted the concrete image of the King with its long history and religious implications. These successive

changes in the nature of the state up to the Civil War had merely altered the meaning of the family. In the play the family itself has disintegrated, or is far along in ruin.

Money is got through competition. The Tolliver family has exchanged love for this competition. The controlling symbols for this are the games which fill the vacuum left by love. Helen, the wife and mother, is the priestess who orders all the play. She will allow no disobedience in this, lest the husk show its emptiness. William with unconscious irony describing in part himself says that gamblers are nervous, senseless sort of men who know they have nothing and ought to want something. He is about to take all his money and flee west, which he considers something new, fleeing west or making more money, just as he is deluded into thinking he can be "outside history." The Senator treats gambling with religious veneration, for it is not only skill, all that it is to William, but also luck: a small abstraction of life itself. "Luck is the most marvellous thing in the world, and no man knows whether or not he is lucky til he's seen his last day." With his historical perspective the Senator in this compares the present moment, where the family is the microcosm of the material society, with only competition and skill left, to the past where the family was an organism out of which man came with a richer sense of the mystery and possibilities of life, not consciously seeking security but seeking out of the only security possible, a stable society, the larger meaning of life.

The irony in the action which Francis Fergusson describes as lying below the plot is just this: that the family must keep up the appearance of amity and love and service, for that is all that is left to disguise their plight, which is selfishness and self-indulgence. All of the threats to the surface calm of the weekend take place: William flees with his money, abandoning his mistress, who breaks off her association with the family; the Senator affronts his audience by talking about old times, reminding them, we presume, of the parts they would like to forget; Lanny attempts suicide; Jim is going away to meet Nancy's people in Tennessee and ask for her hand (jumping from the frying pan into the fire). Any one of these incidents should mar the appearance of things; and yet they happen without in any crucial way disturbing the necessary fixation on appearance. The Tennessee society is

entertained in the front part of the house, while the birthday and anniversary take place in the back room; the meaningless gifts are exchanged; Lanny's birthday cake is brought in all aflame. His father admonishes him to blow the candles out, lest he set the house afire: that is, keep up the appearance or we are lost. Appearance is now the only salvation in a society which the Senator in the speech he never delivers defines as "The most frightful of all spectacles, the strength of civilization without its mercy. . . . It was artfully contrived by Augustus, that, in the enjoyment of plenty, the Romans should lose the memory of freedom."

But with all the changes and reversals which take place and resolve the plot, it is clear that even the appearance of the old family will go. The Senator, in his speech to Lanny, makes this plain. Lanny has hoped by seeing the Senator and talking with him to discover direct and authoritative connection with the past, "as if it were day before yesterday." But there will be by any sensible reckoning of history a thousand years between the Senator's generation and the world Lanny will grow up in. This is the Senator's final warning to the boy, whose eagerness to know himself in terms of his past has forced the Senator to confront in himself his plight, which stands for the plight of all. As the curtain falls, we see that the appearance of family is doomed. Lanny sees it, and his insight is the beginning of manhood. "Give me time. Give me time," he says in the closing lines, not the time which his mother has killed with her games but time to find himself in the reality of the situation which will be his in the brave new servile world.

Mr. Taylor's play is a fine performance. The well-done intricacies of the plot I have left for the reader to find for himself in the pleasure of reading the play, or that better experience of seeing it done on the stage: for no matter how good the dialogue, a play must be seen. And this is a cause for wonder in Mr. Taylor's change from fiction to the drama. The drama is only the scene and depends upon the accidents of extraneous and numerous aids, such as actors whom God made and not the author. Fiction as an art is more responsible to control in its entirety, and the best of actors can never supplant the pictorial or panoramic effects which summarize and prepare for the scene. Mr. Ransom,

in replying to someone who asked him why he had given up the writing of poetry, said "It's a free country." After reading this play, one wonders again how free it is; or certainly how free the fiction writer as artist is to employ his time in a more restricted art form. One sees the Muse frown slightly, not turn away, for surely she understands Mr. Taylor's true devotion.

II

There is a cultural connection, at least, between *The Homecoming Game* and Peter Taylor's play. In the play games fill the vacuum left by the loss of family communion. The hearthstone is no more. Mr. Nemerov shifts the scene to the institution of learning, the public occasion. The subject of Mr. Taylor's play depended upon what was still common between the public and private thing, as the Tennessee society implied the outward appearance of the inward nostalgia for the same general past and the traditional relationships between kin and connection and place. Mr. Nemerov only by indirection is concerned with the failure of the family as institution. With brutal directness and rapid pace the action of his book exposes a crisis in the community of a college.

Upon the eve of the homecoming game Charles Osman, professor of history, "a tentative, kindly, and ironic person," has failed the star football player. At once the pressures upon the professor begin with the president of the Student Council asking him to "flannel" things over and give the boy a make-up test. The complication proceeds from this point up through the echelons of power and influence, with varying degrees of appeal to deny scholastic principles for the sake of expediency. The head of his department, the boy's girl, the president of the college (a former theologian), the coach, and finally two important alumni, a rich man and a senator (big business and politics): everybody but the football player exercises himself over the matter, so that what might have been settled privately between a teacher and his student has become throughout public, institutional, and political.

Faced with the anomaly of the administration asking him, in effect, to deny its rules at the expense of professional honesty, the professor makes no promises but leaves the impression he will probably go along with the general wish. However, he insists that

the boy make his own plea, as if it were merely a personal matter between them. The two meet, and Dr. Osman learns that it has been a public matter all along. Blent, the player, has been bribed by professional gamblers to throw the game. The young hero has faltered as hero, but has acted to recover himself by flunking the tests to make himself ineligible. As in fairy tales, as indeed in life, what at first seems a commonplace, inconsequential matter quickly precipitates the actors upon a quest of far-reaching and profound implication. Osman decides that the boy must play the game, to restore to the public and private thing not seeming but actual honesty. He himself undertakes to return the tainted money and also to convince Solomon, the philosophy professor, whose course the boy has also failed, to go along with his conception of the situation: connive at a smaller dishonesty to prevent one more gross.

This decision, with the economy of a tight structure, carries the surface action through scene and episode, Professor Osman's reflections and feelings and historical analogies, presented through panoramic summaries, to what can only be called anti-climax, to ovaltine for the professor and to the general assumption "that it was only a game after all." For the game was lost, although presumably Blent played his best. But this is irony. The very anti-climax of the "plot" exposes the underlying meaning of the action proper, which has to do with the corruption in a power state, euphemistically called liberal democracy. Mr. Nemerov set his conflict in a college community rather than in Washington, for example, because the action concerns not the game itself but the failure of the institution of learning in its essential function of instruction, of making leaders (that is our boast) who will reduce the brutal forces of power, in themselves always irresponsible, towards order in the state and felicity in private life. Football is the perfect grounds for this. It is a power game; hence the occasion for the corruption of power or its restraint. Young Blent has all the makings of a hero. He has classic beauty; even innocence, if somewhat impaired, and integrity, if rather instinctive. He has survived the sordid training of his carnal parents. By rejecting them, he has set himself apart, although this cost him an abortive attempt at suicide and a bout with a psychiatrist. He admires Osman and with all the surrender

of youth is prepared to be guided by him, for he senses the instructor's good intentions, his will to honesty and civilized behavior.

The courses he fails put the issue squarely: English History and Modern Ethical Theory; that is, knowledge of his past and a guide to conduct. In a traditional and Christian society there is a whole order of disciplines by which the youth may be trained for his mission, and an absolute concept, the City of God, which at an instant may reflect the degree of imperfection of an act in the carnal world. But in a society which is only technically Christian, that is, liberal, as is the society of this book, all that is left the prospective hero for guidance, once clear belief and faith is lost, is a knowledge of the past, by means of which the elect may have at least some chance of the right choice of rules of conduct. But Osman, while proposing to teach history for the end of discovering the "enduring realities," follows the one method which prevents this. He is a relativist. And Solomon, the philosopher, is a materialist. Young Blent complains to Osman of Solomon's instruction "That people in the modern world are divided into fools and knaves. That philosophies are merely procedures for dominating people. That in a hard world the smart man prepares himself to believe nothing, keep up appearances, and make money." When Osman defends his colleague by saying his precepts and example are far apart, Blent replies, "Do you expect us to hear what you teachers say just for kicks? I want some practical value out of my education." The boy is asking for moral tools, the necessary disciplines by means of which he can operate with integrity. Confronted by this, Osman refuses to hear, as the priest refuses to perform his proper office for Emma Bovary by pretending not to understand her spiritual distress. He begs the question by referring to the bribe, but the boy has rejected this and is asking for counsel. Feeling his own share in the common guilt but not recognizing that it derives from his relativism, Osman takes the problem out of the boy's hands. By undertaking to return the tainted money, he usurps the role of hero. He is not only unfitted by training for it; but by pursuing it, he refuses to assume the responsibility proper to his own role; and so, to use a legal expression, compounds the felony.

Mr. Nemerov has brilliantly seen this confusion of roles as the

crux of the action and the source of our disorder. Osman's role, like that of his colleague, Solomon, should have been that of the wise man who remains apart, that of the Indian guru or the Merlin who selects, protects and trains the prospective hero, so that at the proper moment he can perform his act of salvation by rescuing the countryside which has been laid waste by the dragon. In mythology we have come to recognize this aridity, this deadness in nature, as a metaphor for spiritual disaster. The dragon is the concrete image for those dark powers which rise from the abyss and overwhelm the body politic. Appearance instead of reality, expediency instead of principles describes the peril, the giant brute force (another aspect of the dragon) which recognizes no restraints except that of a greater force, whose whims are ruthless and, like the small incident which sets the hero upon his quest, threatens either to save or plunge mankind into the abyss. These dark powers become incarnate in the president of the college, the politician, the business magnate, the students, the criminal world of gambling, the two professors, and the magnate's daughter, the prospective heroine. As enveloping action all these characters comprise a kind of allegory of liberal democracy, which by giving lip service to its Christian inheritance betrays it into accepting the worldly values as the end in itself.

As human beings all these people need to be rescued, that is, restored to their proper callings by assuming a responsibility for the powers and functions they are invested with, in terms of money, politics, parenthood, instruction, etc., and the agglomerate mass of the community to the constraint of ritual rather than mob violence. But the hero never sets out to save a countryside. He always has a specific object for his quest, the rescue of the maiden, whose release automatically and mysteriously restores to the body politic order and to nature the orderly turn of the seasons. This brings us to the actors as they perform in the action proper. By confessing to Osman young Blent is asking for salvation. His own efforts to recover his integrity have brought him only to a neutral position: the refusal to play. But all the forces brought to bear against him will not allow him to maintain this position, which indeed is not that of the hero, who must act. Osman's failure as wise man lies in his refusal to give the word to

Blent, which should have been the total risk of himself, his ruin as student and football star, that is, an open confession of the scandal. This would have brought it all out into the open and forced the college in its entirety to face up to the issues involved. Then Blent would have achieved manhood by assuming responsibility for his acts, and in suffering as victim might have brought about the general purification of the community, including the heroine.

Now the wise man is always set apart. In this novel both Osman and Solomon are Jews. They are outside the Christian inheritance. Instead of being what they are, they want to belong. This is their refusal to accept responsibility for themselves in their historic and human situations. Existing in two bodies instead of one merely emphasizes their incapacity before the reality of the situation. Solomon, as it turns out, is his own knave; for his precepts and example are in accord. His seeming principles are injured vanity at not being accepted. When he is given tenure and a raise in pay, he exactly takes his own advice of keeping up appearances (a Jew can never as Jew accept the Christian state) and making money. He surrenders to the dragon. Osman is a fool twice over, in refusing to be either a Jew or a Christian, and as wise man undertaking the role of hero. He considers himself a civilized man, but there is no such thing as civilization in general. At one moment he sums up civilization as a parody of its myths. By not being what he is, by misfitting the outside and inside, appearance and reality, he parodies the hero: he becomes the fool. He is made a fool of by the restaurant keeper; but his own folly reaches its climax when he takes the drunken heroine home, after the travesty of returning the tainted money, and she offers herself to him. His confusion of his identity makes itself clear in his refusal to take her. He thinks he wants to marry her and his sense of decency won't let him take her in lust; and yet afterwards he is not sure how drunk she was and feels unmanned. Previously he has forced the girl to say she loves him when she has already told him he merely gives her pleasure. The reader knows no marriage will take place, as the reader knows she is a heroine in distress. She is described as an aristocrat who looks like a slave girl: the heroine in the clutches of the dark powers. Her invitation to Osman is "Hurt me. Hurt Me," which plainly describes the

nature of her enslavement. Young Blent treated her with all the innocence and circumspection of youth looking for its mate; but because Osman failed as wise man, Blent fails as hero. After the game, Lily the flower maiden gives herself to Blent and is discovered by Osman. All that Osman can feel is injured vanity and failure without understanding it. Young Blent, thinking of the proprieties, announces that they are going to be married, which we know will not take place, because both are lost now. Only Blent's risk of the abyss would have made him a man capable of assuming responsibility in the Christian sacrament of marriage. But he is no man, only a confused and corrupted youth, for he says, "it was only a game after all," in other words meaningless play, in which the real issues can be ignored.

This travesty of love represents the travesty of the entire action. In the end they all are a little deeper in the realm of the dragon. Osman tells the president, "Everybody seems to've won something out of the deal. Blent got his girl [but not the girl as he wanted her], I've got money [which he can't spend] . . . the people back of it have got enormous sums, probably [but with the insecurity which inheres in the criminal world] and you have your college [but an instrument of power, not learning]. Even Blent's parents are going to live together again" [until they separate again]. This, I take it, is the final meaning of Mr. Nemerov's book, the failure of the liberal to control the criminal powers in the individual and hence in the state, so that the body politic hovers upon the edge of the abyss, with only the mask of appearance to give the semblance of order to the institutions, both public and private. Like Osman, the liberal as wise man, as teacher and guide, never takes responsibility for his instruction, for the place he occupies. He wants a better world—for somebody else. He sits in the high seat but refuses the obligations which go with it. He wants to save the situation but refuses the risk of loss which always attends salvation. In the name of the thing he betrays the thing. Conscience, decency, civilized behavior, noble intentions, abstract ideals in his hands become sentimental because of this final refusal to take responsibility. Mr. Nemerov has shrewdly shown the muddled incapacity for action by allowing Osman to try to act. Osman is a man of conscience but a relativist. Principles are never relative. A principle does not

say on the one hand, and then on the other. It takes its stand and falls or persists at that post. It is why Osman is made a fool of by the restaurant keeper who is the realist in the dragon's world, who accepts the power state as the condition of things and, with sympathy, patronizes such fools as Osman. The final turn of this screw is the refusal of the restaurant keeper's chauffeur to take a tip from the professor: he contemptuously says he makes more money. The essence of criminality is the exercise of power without a responsible attitude towards it, which reduces human beings to their material qualities. The professional gamblers have truly interpreted Solomon's dicta. All the others, the politician, the business magnate, the president of the college keep up the illusion of appearances but they are just as criminal. The necessity for salvation, and its miscarriage which the book's action so well shows, is apparent in their fright before the mob, which is disbanded by the president's surrender (allowing Blent to play) under the guise of the exercise of his authority. And the victim, who should have been Blent, with all the ritual of sacrifice, turns out to be an anonymous student who accidentally falls in the bonfire, to die meaninglessly; and his death is meaninglessly announced by the chaplain just before the kick-off to the community assembled for the game, who cannot listen, already caught up in the anticipatory frenzy of the show of power ("it is only a game after all"); for the voice of the priest is abstract and empty, its spiritual impotence echoing the physical impotence which the game now represents, which the knave Solomon and the fool Osman personify.

Tennessee Day in St. Louis has the tone and indirection of fiction. *The Homecoming Game*, in its pace and rapid succession of scenes, is far closer to the theater. It seems to go too fast towards the end; and yet on reflection it is all done. The protagonist, Professor Osman, is a pathetic figure, for all he has gone through and suffered leaves him, like the community, as he was before the action started. He has learned nothing about himself in his place. And yet he is not quite the same. He will teach history, as the school will continue, with less belief in himself and without quite understanding this. His irony, in all probability, will become cynicism now. I have the feeling that there is a partial failure of the post of observation on Mr.

Nemerov's part. It is that of the central intelligence, with the author hovering very close to the protagonist; and yet at times he seems to withdraw arbitrarily. For example, the suicide of the professor's wife, which has caused him until the present action to withdraw from life. We are deep in the reflections of Osman's mind on this matter, but he reflects only upon the surface. He must have gone deeper in confronting himself over this matter, for his withdrawal represents a decision. This is not quite playing fair with the reader and leaves a flaw at the end of an otherwise excellent rendition. In history at another time comparable to ours God manifested himself through a Jew to save mankind. In this fiction a Jew assumes, not as God but as a confused man, the role of mitigating a worldly corruption in an institution. He is unequal to the role, and he does not understand why he has failed. One wonders why the author, who has made him an intelligent man and a historian, does not allow him to understand his plight better, and thus make him a purged man at least, if not a hero. By implication, in the enveloping action, we can understand that his relationship to a Christian society which no longer believes in itself denies him a fuller comprehension, but in some way this should have been clear in the action proper. Lacking this clarity, the novel seems to go too fast towards the end, and the reader is left with a turgid feeling, instead of release.

III

With Walter Sullivan's novel, *Sojourn of a Stranger*, the basis of the complication comes from the act of Major Hendrick, whose disgust before the world's injustices turns him into a kind of liberal. In pre-Civil War Tennessee he marries an octoroon and has a son who in appearance shows none of his darker blood. Mr. Sullivan with bold strategy has avoided the more obvious kind of miscegenation. Here is a boy who, by various accidents, becomes the heir to a distinguished and rich Tennessee family. In appearance and feeling he is white, and yet the full reality of his situation cannot hide the small taint of the blood. Thus Mr. Sullivan states in his complication the extreme possibility of racial and social injustice; and yet miscegenation is not the full intention of the author's subject. There is a quality of doom and pagan fate which hangs over the Hendrick family. The old general, the boy's grand-

father, was unlucky in all things except the goods of this world. He was defeated in his campaign against the British in the War of 1812. His oldest son cut himself off from his place in the family and society by his marriage. His other son died of yellow fever, leaving only the grandson to inherit name and property, who because of his condition could not represent fully either name or property. Such is the situation as the book opens.

Behind any society lies the inequality of material possessions and social station. This was taken for granted by General Hendrick and his associates in the Old West, who in their development of this region assisted their own fortunes. Coming from the eastern seaboard, accepting the distinctions of a hierarchically ordered society, there was no doubt in their minds that the men of substance should rule, as there was as surely the acceptance that they should hold themselves responsible for their position of power. They did not deny the equality of opportunity, but they scorned as folly any belief in such equality in nature or man. By recognizing and accepting what their eyes showed, they maintained, upon the natural imperfections of the world, order in the state. Along with this, at the inception of the American Union, was fomented what could only seem a social and political heresy to the rational minds of the men of property. We have come to call this the liberal attitude, the hope that Paradise in some way can be maintained in this brave new world of the wilderness. Major Hendrick, the elder son of the general, with the fine instincts for justice and compassion for the human predicament and disgust at the procedures of property and power (this is often the genesis for liberal action), turns upon his father's world. He withdraws from a law partnership because of the abuse of justice: a master who should have hanged for murdering a slave was freed on a technicality. So far he was acting as a member of his caste. Theoretically this kind of action was condoned by the society his father represented. It was a miscarriage of legal justice, which is as old as any society. But this led him, later on, to withdraw from business, which by its nature gains only at the disadvantage of some party to the action, rather than take advantage of a widow in money matters. Mr. Sullivan has not convinced me in this, because technically he has not shown the human causes for the withdrawal. He merely lets it

strike Major Hendrick as out of the blue, where there is the widow who could have, as a being, affected him. He does convince by involving Major Hendrick when he tries to rectify a racial and institutional injustice in his marriage to a New Orleans octoroon who has been abandoned by her patron. He is successful in this episode because of a fuller circumstance which brings the octoroon alive in her various relationships, and particularly that with Major Hendrick. Major Hendrick is one of the most convincing characters in the book. I know of no liberal in fiction who is so well done. He is made to suffer for his action, which derives from generous feeling and a soft head. He sets out to disarrange an established order. His act is an irresponsible act for two reasons: he ignores the inequalities in the social order without being able to find any concrete means to better the situation. And so he isolates himself and his wife from the society which surrounds him. At least in New Orleans the condition of the kept octoroon gave her a place and a society of a kind, but in violating the mores he not only cut her off from this but himself as well, establishing them both in a social vacuum. Gradually he took to drink and trading in money; that is, he reduced himself as a person and as a citizen to the carnal minimum of his possibilities as a man; and yet he was a man and able to understand his predicament and to suffer for it. It is upon the inadequacies of the carnal and temporal world, as well as the Jacksonian tradition of military success, that the octoroon mother places her hopes for her son, Allen. She is responsible for their removal back to Gallatin on the gamble, which succeeds, of having the grandfather accept his grandson as heir. The conflict of the book has to do with whether or not he can come into the fullness of his inheritance, not merely its economic base. The promise of the mother gave the boy hope. She recited to him how his uncle, a gentleman of color, fought side by side with the Tennesseans under Jackson at New Orleans in that great victory. Surely a society is yours, if you can fight for it, with no mention of a taint. But she oversimplified, and her wishes were founded on false hope. To begin with, the military tradition she returns her son to is not victory, but, ominously, defeat; and in a traditional society there are many distinctions.

One of these distinctions is the free Negro, Ben Hill. The

author uses him well. His freedom goes little further than a certain economic possibility. In spite of his emancipation he acts like any Negro who has not been treated right. This shows in his sullen dependency upon Major Hendrick, in his belief in the Major's absolute knowledge and power over money, which is a part of Ben Hill's grudging acceptance of the white race's supremacy in all matters, grudging because he does not understand it. He regards the Major's gifts as a magical formula, and he feels its ritual is being deliberately withheld from him. Not understanding that the Major's gifts and intelligence are relative and that he takes risks, the free Negro blinds himself to the white man's sympathy and genuine desire to help him and others of his race. And so Ben Hill, believing in magic, betrays himself but blames his benefactor and later revenges himself upon Allen, the son. Very subtly the author, in the larger pattern of the action, uses Ben Hill as a kind of symbol for an equal blindness in General Hendrick and what amounts on the part of this family to a belief in the magical power of money. It was the mother's belief in it which brought the son back, but it was the grandfather's possession of it which held out hope to his grandson that it might solve for him the ambiguity of his plight. So when Allen is rebuffed in a friendly manner, as he tries to call on a girl of the family's acquaintance, the boy is made to confront the limitations of his inheritance. But he only partially confronts it. He remains blind: that is, he still has hope. When in Nashville on business, lonely and somewhat rebellious, he calls on the daughter of his grandfather's old companion in arms. She receives him; they fall in love and she promises to marry him—but later. The situation is radically and socially reversed. The girl is white, the boy has the taint, which is to say that both are brought squarely against the manners and mores of their society, which forbids more absolutely their union than in his father and mother's case.

The structure of this society serves for the enveloping action, and I would like to define it as it shows in this book, for we now have reached the action on its way to resolution. It is a society, in the long decline of the European tradition, which has lost the fullest sense of the Christian vision. Allen's father and grandfather, the liberal and the man of tradition and property, both accept the world as the end in itself, which is contrary to the original Christian conception which made it the occasion for the

drama of the soul. This is to say that the devil, the antagonist, has in his subtle way persuaded formal and public opinion to accept the means for the end. The liberal denies the fallen state of man and nature. He believes he can act upon others, rarely upon himself, and restore the former condition of wholeness and perfect justice; that is, he can interpret at any given moment God's mysterious intentions. This is the sin of pride and it destroyed Major Hendrick. General Hendrick is more responsible in his situation than his son. He accepts the multiplicity of variety in the state and nature, which is our fallen condition; and he supports the inherited Christian hierarchy bringing order to an imperfect world. He is a good man, a responsible man, and no doubt believes he is a Christian man. Nevertheless his sin is pride, too; and it lies paradoxically in his assumption of responsibility for owning God's land outright and the slaves, made in God's image, absolutely. But he is subject to the Puritan heresy, which is the direct approach to God, without any warning intercessor. The danger in this lies in identifying his private will with God's; so that his sin is not only in believing that he, as a man, is equal to his authority, but also that his private interests and selfish purposes may seem to derive from God. He tells his grandson that tobacco is money, which is certainly an oversimplification. This promise, however, for so the boy takes it almost literally, is a promise that he will come into his full inheritance by marriage to his girl. If the Christian vision had been stronger in Tennessee at that time, Allen's problem would have been how to save his soul. His grounds for action would have been the limitation of his blood and place. The end of the action would not have been, as in this book, how to force a society to deny its structure to gratify his will. At the end he does achieve a kind of Christian humility. When he loses everything, including the girl, he sees that he has been selfish, thinking only of himself; and for this he seems willing to take the consequences.

But I feel that in the development of the resolution the author has failed to prepare the grounds for this. He has not made the love between them convincing. It is always hard to find the technical failure, but I believe it shows in his misuse of decorum. It works well enough in the seminary, where the two meet under the surveillance of a chaperone and in the stilted requirements of intercourse of that institution; but not entirely there, for a mutual

attraction should appear more sensibly even under the conditions of their meeting. We are too much aware of decorum only. Manners and mores are the formal restraints upon action, and conflicts in life and fiction often begin by the natural man violating these very conditions; and when there is no violation the very constraint heightens the response. I feel the author has in this instance been too much drawn into his hero's reliance on decorum. On the whole, and very effectively too, the pace and tone of the book is measured and has a formal tone. The dialogue has it. In one instance it becomes a mannerism instead of manner, by the repetition of a name. "Allen," he said. "Allen, I am glad to see you." This has the restraint of measure, but it is repeated too many times. When Allen and his girl meet back in the country, secretly under the sky and at night, the formalities still prevail. This was the time, if ever, when he should have convinced us of an attraction strong enough to deliver the final meaning of the resolution. But their responses are the same as in the drawing room. Here certainly he should have used the senses, got into the hero's mind more thoroughly. Instead of using decorum to heighten the pathos of their situation Mr. Sullivan has allowed it to muffle feeling. The point of view remains too close to the outward appearance of the scene, not at the post where the restraints and inward feeling could be shown working against each other. This same criticism holds for the Civil War section. I feel here that he could have recovered himself if he had used the mind of his hero to reflect more sharply the changes war had put upon his reason for entering it, instead of paraphrasing battles, good in themselves but the wrong kind of middle for his conflict. The girl's father had promised him, if the war was won, he would get the girl. His action became related almost entirely to this *idée fixe*. The larger violence of experience which the war must have made upon a person of his sensitivity was too briefly shown, and it is hard to believe that such would not have made progressive alteration upon his growth. It did to the girl. She refuses him at the end on the grounds that too much had happened.

This is a first book, and Mr. Sullivan's talents are many. The subject which engages him is a complicated one, perhaps such a subject as one should attempt at the end of a career, not the beginning.



A Moveable Feast: *The Going To and Fro*

A GREAT HAZARD to an artist is his reputation. Except to that small body of readers who look to the word for meaning, the reputation is almost sure to be false to the work, composed as it is of the accidents of personality, at best the embodiment of the quality of artist as man. This implies the artist as man capable of making a lot of money. In a secular world, which sets profit instead of utility as the reward of work, money is the final judgment of any act, including the creative act. The matter is simple: if you make a lot of money from a story (especially from secondary sources such as the movies, etc.) you have to spend it or invest it. In either case think a lot about it. This takes time and the work suffers. Only a great devotion to a craft can resist the Lilliputian entanglements. The critics of the Higher Illiteracy are the whipping boys of such reputations. It saves them the strain of reading. Apparently most of these fellows who have treated publicly of Hemingway's *A Moveable Feast* have let the reputa-

tion bemuse them beyond the grave. Death is a time for summing up, for judgment. Perhaps they believe no more in death than in life.

Hemingway was not just a reputation; he was also an artist, but an artist who faltered and assumed the various masks of his public personality. Acting is a secondary art, depending upon the work of others: in this instance the illusion of a whole work which actually was only partially delivered. Or so it may seem. But this is a half truth. After first reading *A Moveable Feast* I thought his publishers had done him a disservice. I now feel the book is extremely revealing: the public personality was there from the start; even in his apprenticeship it was there, the struggle between the ego and its transformation in the artifact. Most craftsmen suffer this conflict, and either end up as artists or personalities. Apparently Hemingway never made the choice, even if he was aware that a choice existed. It is always hazardous to read the inward decisions in the outward action, but there is a curious evasion in the introduction to this book. The reader is given the choice by Hemingway of reading *A Moveable Feast* either as a memoir or as fiction. Obviously this is a false choice. Was he trying to get himself off the hook, or had he come to think that he might over-ride all forms in the self-regard of that carnal omniscience of his?

There are too many hooks to get free of; so it must be the devouring omniscience which defines the pathos of the action here. These early days in Paris were wonderful days. So we are told, and we are prepared to believe them so, until we begin to wonder at the wonders. There is not an associate of his, who conceivably might be his rival, or to whom he owed anything, that receives anything but denigration of character or profession. Not once does he show any human sympathy or charity towards his fellow man. The method is very workable. The professional competence of each is betrayed through the deficiencies and follies of a personal and private nature. Towards Ford Madox Ford there is malice and hatred, so obvious that his craftsmanship fails him, and one wonders if Ford did not help him most of all. But then there is Gertrude Stein. He sat at her feet, was her errand boy, and drank her wine; yet in an obscene kind of false prudery he pretends to flee the sounds of her love cries coming

from the room nearby. He remained long enough to hear them distinctly: or is this fiction? At one point at Pound's request Hemingway helps raise funds to get Eliot out of the bank so that he can be more free to write. This turns out to be unnecessary; so Hemingway gambles away the money he raised at the races and accuses Eliot of leading him into immorality. But he didn't really mean it—it was a kind of jest—for obviously he was the writer, the only one, and hence the money should have gone to him. And how can you take what is properly yours?

At first Pound seems an exception. His praise for Pound is extravagant, but a closer reading leads to doubt. Pound is excessively loyal to his friends in praise of their work, but this loyalty is disastrous to his judgment. Except for Hemingway, Pound's choice of friends seems no better than his literary judgment. For example, Wyndham Lewis is "nasty." He quotes Miss Stein as saying Lewis is a measuring worm. This makes him a nasty measuring worm. Certainly his quality of evil lacks the "dignity of a hard chancr," and that's really some lack of dignity, as anybody will agree. But in Lewis' presence (Pound and Hemingway were sparring) Hemingway "—tried to make him [Pound] look as good as possible." He found this hard to do; so we must add that to Pound's bad literary judgment, in sport (virility) he is no better. His wife, however, was built well. Physically and mentally Pound seems to be undone by his virtues.

Hemingway is very amusing about Scott Fitzgerald. There are many pages exposing Fitzgerald's foibles about his health, showing the infantile fears in the grown man and artist, until the reader soon wonders how this child-man had maturity enough to write at all. And wonders further when Fitzgerald consults Hemingway about "measurements" which Zelda, his wife, presents to her husband as grounds for complaint. At the friend's invitation they retire to the W. C. for an examination, and there the husband learns the heraldic difference between at rest and rampant. Still not quite reassured the husband is taken to the Louvre to see the naked statues. But neither art nor heraldry nor professional, though friendly, advice, seems quite to do, because finally Zelda, the wife, is jealous of the Muse. She keeps her husband on a round of parties, so that he won't be able to do his work. This may be a true observation, but it is not the only one.

Years later at the Ritz bar in Paris a former chasseur asks papa who this man Fitzgerald is. People keep asking him but he doesn't remember. Maybe if papa writes about him, then he will remember who he was. To have a rival alive only in your imagination and at the mercy of your craft must be a wonderful triumph, if this is the end of art; and if you can forget that out in the world, as an objective fact, *The Great Gatsby* and other of his works still are and are read.

Now why is it that Hemingway wants to be the only one, the only artist and the only man? Why does he want Paris without people? Nor is he content to be the patron of the living and his elders in the crafts, but the past too he wants to envelop in so far as he recognizes what he considers his kind of virility there. But how can anybody, without the severest delusion, speak of Marshall Ney, as Mike Ney, as if he and Ney were old buddies and messmates? It has puzzled me a long time, Hemingway's hatred, at least contempt for tourists. It has seemed so inordinate and actually so irrelevant to the actions of his fictions, for example, *The Old Man and the Sea*. After reading *A Moveable Feast* I think I know. The tourist can go home. Hemingway couldn't. He lived in exile and the kind hardest to bear, self-exile. His residence at Key West was barely in the country; then Cuba, just outside. Later the far isolated West, where the home-tourists matched the International set he wrote about. Why this is so is nobody's business. He had doomed himself to the life of the perpetual tourist, forever in foreign parts, wandering to and through the wonders advertized. No scene, no mountain, not any city, even Paris, could be home. It is pathetic, his self-identity with Paris, with the restaurants, the streets and parks, as if they were laid out for his pleasure and sole appreciation. He in this book named the streets, the two ways to a given destination, to show his knowledge and control, against all those tourists intruding upon his exile. He only showed by this his isolation. Who when at home consciously says or thinks—Now I'm going two blocks up Main then turn off on Vine a block, right on College and into Mr. Maney's Avenue? Instinctively following the known ways and the known patterns of behavior—this is being at home. Here one gardens without being conscious of the strangers in town. Or fishes without saying it is serious, as opposed to those who play at

it because it is the thing to do. One fishes. One makes love. You don't have to insist that it is good or that a good meal is fine to eat. His ignorance of this is the pathos of Hemingway's curiosity about the private lives of his acquaintances. The insensitive reporting of what is private shows the need for intimacy and knowledge of a neighborhood that is one's own. But Hemingway has none; only the International set. Paris cannot be his or any foreigner's. The conventions there could not restrain him or instruct him in the difference between the public and private thing, because they were not his conventions nor could ever be his mores. He has bitter things to say about the family, but Paris would not be without families. The intimacy he feels in his "café" is the very domesticity of café life and its communal feeling. The one thing, the crucial thing, he never saw about Paris was that it was the capital of the French, the true head of a people. Parisians were Parisians, but when the distinguished provincial from Provence or Normandy came to Paris, he did not lose his local identity. He came to Paris, the head, as the representative of his province to give and receive, but no Provençal ever let himself be confused with a man from Normandy. The International set never got involved with the reality of this life, for this life stood for the order in the state and its meaning. Try to imagine the International set at a Guermantes salon. By its nature this set thrown up after the First World War is in exile, with only its appetites to depend upon. Hence the continual reference to good food and drink and the love-making; but finally this must have seemed meaningless, for it did not prevent Hemingway's first marriage from breaking up. He could blame it on the rich, but more than appetite sustains this ancient institution. There is a name for the betrayal of marriage, well understood. Adultery. It was his, perhaps, but how could he blame himself? He was in another country, and besides the wench was dead.



The Son of Man: He Will Prevail

But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.

MATT. 13:24

IN THE STRICTEST sense *A Fable* is not a fable.¹ Nor is it fiction, strictly speaking. It is not even an allegory proper. It is perhaps a morality sometimes using the form of fiction. It is certainly homiletic. The text is the Son of Man in search of identity with the Father. The enveloping action—that animated condition against which the action takes place, or out of which it comes—is man's dual nature as it involves “the problems of the human heart in conflict with itself” . . . “beginning when his first paired children lost well the world and from which paired prototypes they still challenged paradise, still paired and still immortal against the chronicle's grimed and blood-stained pages.” The book's legend derives from the Hebraic root of western culture—from the first part of the Synoptic gospels, especially where the Son

¹ *A Fable* by William Faulkner.

bears witness of the Father; certainly not from the book of John. Christ speaks there as the Son of God. Indeed Faulkner departs even from the religious interpretation of the final acts of the Synoptic gospels. He limits himself to the body of the world, not that that body doesn't contain the spirit. It is only that he leaves what is beyond life strictly alone. Whatever is supernatural in this book lies in the mystic balance of the life force itself.

Every man has that within him which saves or damns, but Faulkner seems to be saying that he is never saved or damned absolutely. The scales are forever dipping their alternate weights. Man endures his situation not because he is immortal: he is immortal because he endures. What he endures is every degree and gradation of his dual nature. The old Negro preacher, Mister Toolecyman (all the world), says to the Runner, "Evil is a part of man, evil and sin and cowardice, the same as repentance and being brave. You got to believe in all of them, or believe in none of them. Believe that man is capable of all of them, or he aint capable of none."

The action proper concerns a mysterious Corporal and twelve followers who try to resolve this dualism. The scene is the western front at the time of the false spring armistice. It is false because it is no true armistice, and further the hopes aroused prove to be false hopes. A regiment mutinies in the trenches. The Corporal is responsible for it. His mission is to convince individual men that, by acting together, by refusing to go over the top, they can put an end to strife and bloodshed: that is, men acting with purpose can establish the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. The conflict arises between the Corporal's party and those in authority who, presumably out of fear and hatred, kept the bloodshed going.

Since conflict is the basis of life (Faulkner states it in one place as the initial primordial flaw) a world war is the extreme occasion for and definition of man's situation; and this particular war which has locked men in trenches deep in the earth is the clearest statement of it. The four-year stalemate not only returns man to the mud and slime; it imposes the condition of the earthworm, one of the lowest and blindest forms of life. Man, so reduced, is denied his humanity. The long trench is an orifice from which he, confined there in the sweat and ordure of his body, is evacuated to his death, to the condition of total physical excrement. The

General for whose benefit the attack was ordered (it was intended to fail) is a commander of a group of armies whose mastery derives from his passionate concern with his own orifice. This is to be interpreted not merely that he went Napoleon one better, changing belly to anus; but that man, since he has been cast out by the Father, is at the mercy of his physical processes. It is in this army group the Corporal does his work, in a corps whose commander believes that the whole moiling mass of man is the officer's enemy. The division commander, Gragnon, interprets this belief into a principle of action: men must and can be ruled by fear of and hatred for their officers. To this attitude the Corporal proposes mass disobedience. He offers hope and courage and compassion. The success of the mutiny raises this hope, for the mutiny spreads over the entire front. War stops on both sides. But there is a catch. It stops but the men are still in the trenches. All they have to do is make the simple physical movement of walking across No Man's Land, with hands out, weaponless, in the hope that the enemy will do the same, to bring peace and render the Generals impotent before hope fulfilled. But the leader, the Corporal and his followers have been put under arrest and sent to the rear, as have the mutineers. The catch is betrayal. One of the Corporal's own has gone to the authorities.

But there is still hope. The Runner, whose occupation has put him in a position to know what is going on, thinks there is time still to beat the Generals. But his mission is a little different. He must deal not with hope but man's cynicism. He will have to force man to save himself. He has previously committed an act symbolic of the action of all the characters of rank. Once an officer himself, because he came to hate man for submitting to the degradation of his condition, he forced the authorities to break him. He becomes an outcast both to authority and to the men in the trenches. Both hold him in suspicion; yet his act has set him on the way of salvation. Faulkner mentions in his foreword the hanged man and the bird. He gives credit to James Street's *Look Away*. I couldn't find the book, but in the Tarot deck of playing cards, Le Pendu, social death, is card number twelve. It comes just before thirteen, the death card. These two cards represent the two kinds of quests which the chief characters undertake. There are many interpretations of the Tarot pack. Heinrich

Zimmer in *The King and the Corpse* thinks that the meaning might derive from an “esoteric order of initiation of gradually amplifying enlightenment whereby the initiate, beset by as many characteristic temptations, at last arrives at the stage of mystical union with the Holy Trinity.” In *A Fable* all Faulkner’s heroes, and everybody is a hero there, suffer the deliberate loss either of rank or of life. Each protagonist and antagonist, and each is protagonist-antagonist, is a criminal. Each violates in varying degree the civil or military code. Each kills that of himself which he values most; or upon his quest he kills his fellow man. But if he is a murderer, he is a sacred criminal, somewhat like the priest-murderer at Nemi. Lose life to save it; suffer little children to come unto me, for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven: paradoxes interpreted in terms of the quest mean that man must plunge himself into degradation to be reborn out of the perfect knowledge of and triumph over himself; and sometimes he can only find life through physical death; and always at the risk of the loss of himself.

In Chrétien’s “The Knight of the Cart” the cart stands for social and legal disgrace, as the animal is carried in it on the way to the gallows. When Launcelot and Gawain undertook the quest to the land of no return to rescue Guinevere, both were invited by the driver to mount. Gawain, Arthur’s nephew and the perfect hero, refused to sully his knighthood and lose his rank. Even Launcelot hesitated two steps, but he did get in, symbolically sacrificing his rank as he would later his life. These symbolic acts were necessary to restore the soul of life from the realm of the dead, and because Gawain refused the cart, he was denied the highest degree of the adventure. This is an interpretation of the older mythological meaning behind Chrétien’s romance of medieval chivalry. Guinevere is the flower maiden as are Persephone and Blodeuwedd and others in the pre-Christian myths. She is the life source, and like all goddesses who demand complete and unthinking devotion is cold to her savior for his moments of hesitation. But saviors generally hesitate once before their agony: May this cup be taken from me; the Buddha’s hesitation to preach.

Faulkner has modified the myth. There is little hesitation, and there is no flower maiden in *A Fable*. Rank must be sacrificed and

even life, but the conflict is in other terms. The hope of salvation is largely masculine. It becomes the quest for self-knowledge, for man's relief from his own nature. And this nature's lot is so deprived, the trials so severe as scarcely to allow for that communion of a true marriage between man and woman. This brings the protagonist-antagonist to self-victimage, acting both in the confinement of an internal conflict and outwardly in the conflict of man with man. Neither aspect is neglected. The search becomes, therefore, the quest for the Father, not the rescue of the "Mothers," the Father of absolute authority, the all-knower, the chastiser who also loves. The question the Son of Man asks himself is, Why am I outcast? "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" Why am I forsaken? Why have I had to undergo the dolorous quest of pain and sorrow and death? Since the Father is all-perfect, the sin, the imperfection, must lie with the Son. An unconscious guilt of innocence is the source of the mystery. A reunion with the Father presumably will expiate the guilt. To emphasize this Faulkner has made all the heroes orphans. He allows to some a mother, but she is of necessity a widow. Orphanage is the common plight; bastardy is the absolute statement of it, since the bastard was abandoned even in the womb. Deprived from birth of the right to give up his social rank, he must undergo the harder role. The number of his card is thirteen.

The Sentry-Jockey is wonderfully deprived even for a bastard, whereas the Corporal, like Jesus, is of high birth. The Jockey and the race horse represent the centauric nature of man, but the roles seem to be reversed. It is the horse, winning races on three legs, which at first seems to carry the higher virtues, the Jockey now become groom, the lower. The Jockey has nothing but this purely instinctive and intuitive aspect of the human creature; he seems even to have been foaled in the stable and cannot be imagined apart from it. The accident which broke the horse's leg sent him upon the quest for the more human side of himself. He too becomes a criminal along with the old Negro and his grandson as accessories. He "steals" the horse (and this theft entails others) to let him, impaired as he is, win races, do what he can do best rather than what any horse can do, breed others. This becomes a heroic adventure. All the power of the law and society

becomes his opponent. In the pure impassioned pursuit of his animal nature, made surrogate in the horse, the very heroism which it entails brings the Jockey to accept the supernatural fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man: he is baptized by the old Negro and is taken into the Masons. But this belief is as yet unsure, for the moment comes when the opposing powers overtake him, He has to shoot the horse to save him. It is a moment of spiritual peril for the Jockey, as it is a moment of symbolic death and rebirth. He is reborn to despair and stoicism. He renounces his faith in God but he has advanced over his previous state. He comes into the fellowship of man: that is, he accepts the condition as bad; but he faces this knowledge and prepares to endure it. The Jockey's incomplete initiation in the swamps and upon the roads carries him to the Tennessee mountains, to a remote cove that is well out of the world. It parallels the Supreme General's initiation, but at a different level, in the desert and other remote mountain fastness. As foster child to a poor mountain couple the Jockey recovers the image of parenthood, but the very image makes apparent his lack of the real thing. From animal intuition he has reached the human state. This is an advance, but a greater trial awaits him. His card has not yet turned.

It is the old Negro's role to affirm the heroic and immortal nature of the quest by giving himself up to the civil authority. He is the father in search of the lost son, but his action causes man in the mass and the chief agent of authority, who has already understood and surrendered his office, to witness the heroic quality latent in all men and the capacity of man in mass to act. The court house is taken over by a quiet but resolute mob and in it justice is given. Civil authority and power is vanquished. The house of justice prevails over the jail house: the spirit of the law over the letter. But the action is incomplete. The father does not find the son. The quest continues and finds itself in a larger field of action.

The court house and the jail house are the dominant symbols for man in times of civil peace, as the palace and citadel serve for war in the older hierarchically ordered Europe. The jail is here, too, and the trench, as the Place is the counterpart of the Square. Just as the quest in America is performed in terms of the animal

nature of man, so that quest in Europe involves at its height the intellectual and spiritual, the deliberate surrender of self in search of salvation. The Jockey—old Negro—Negro youth, a trinity of instinct-faith-innocence, has its counterpart in the Corporal—old General—young airman, spirit-wisdom-innocence, at the top of the hierarchy. The structure also opposes the plain, low born against the high born with power and great estate. There is also the forerunner, the John the Baptist, who announces the coming of the savior: the Runner for the lower level, the old Quartermaster General for the upper. But with these Faulkner, as elsewhere, distorts to his own interpretation the tradition.

The controlling image for the action is rank; for the enveloping action the wasteland of the desert, the wilderness, and mountain. The great quests of mythology eventually lead the heroes into either one or both or all three, the arid desert or the Celtic forest, aridity or the superabundance of nature. The forest, mythologically considered, is the realm of the soul entangled in nature's maze; the desert more nearly fits in this book—not the seasonal death of the sun god which must freshen with the rise of the tanist, but the opposing death in hell of Christian theology. All the generals who composed the council of power receive their initiation in the desert. They are either sent there or they go willingly: Mama Bidet, Gragnon, Lallemont, the Quartermaster, the old Supreme General: but they go as young men. They go to Africa, the dark continent, but they do not go all to the same place. How far they penetrate the desert determines the degree of initiation. Only for the Generalissimo and the Quartermaster is reserved the furthest reaches and the highest measure of sacrifice. The paired prototypes who have well lost the world are not man and woman. They are father and son. Mama Bidet's preoccupation with his orifice, which gives him his nickname, dramatizes the loss of the feminine source of the quest, much older than the father-son interpretation as it is considered in *A Fable*. Yeats's view of the dualism, that love and excrement have one organic location, found the mystery of the continuum of life in what would produce it. Mama Bidet's preoccupation makes a radical reduction. Leaving out love, the creative love between man and woman, there is left only excrement. The conflict is purely masculine and the responsibility for it is man's. War sprang from

“the loins of man’s furious ineradicable greed. We [the Captains and the Colonels] are his responsibility; he shall not shirk it.” In the Tarot pack his card would be twenty-three, the next to last, the Dancing Hermaphrodite, that embodiment in a single form of all the pairs of opposites, but inverted, since the female part can find itself only in the vague resemblance in the male organism, in a mockery which affirms the insolubility of the predicament so long as the search is restricted to masculine terms. A hopeless hope is the only relief. He tells Gragnon, “Let them believe that tomorrow they will end it [war]; then they won’t begin to ponder if perhaps today they can.” “That’s the hope you will invest in them.” Until the word Fatherland is obliterated (and he knows it won’t be), war, the supreme definition of the dualism, will continue. He knows this because he is a widow’s son. His yearning for a father has brought from his quest this understanding. Gragnon, a man entirely alone, brought up in a convent, refused the solace of impersonal parentage, and with no help from anyone raised his rank from Sergeant Gragnon to Major-General Gragnon. His response is obedience. Disobedience means death. He is willing to shoot the last man in support of this principle. But he is only a Major-General. There is greater authority over him. This is his damnation and will be his martyrdom. He sacrificed his rank out of belief in a principle, but that is not the end of his quest. A foundling bastard, his card, too, is thirteen. He has to die physically to be resurrected in glory. A professional killer without fatherland, he will be glorified by the fraud of the bullet in his chest instead of the back where, struggling, he forced it to lodge as the literal mark of his betrayal by the regiment of principles which to him was his integrity.

The culmination of the extreme possibilities of social and physical sacrifice falls to the lot of the old Supreme General and his bastard son, the Corporal. At this level the refinement of meaning reaches its crisis. The Corporal, from the ranks but the son of his father, is able to gather about his mission all the degrees of the quest. The highest degree is earned by his father. Instead of a trial presenting the choice of the surrender of rank, the acceptance of the outcast state as the means of resurrection, he by will and choice makes the sacrifice. As a youth he is endowed with grace and beauty, gifts of the mind and the flesh and the

spirit. He is an orphan (the image of his parents hangs in a locket about his neck) but he is the heir to supreme world power, the two kinds of power which complement each other and are the source of all world power: economic and political. His uncle is a cabinet member who dominates the government; his godfather (the irony is very broad here) owns munition works so vast that they pass national boundaries and suffuse the body politic like cancer. And then there is Paris, the city of the world supreme in her gifts, ready and anxious to offer herself to a youth so well endowed. All of this he renounces, and all means the ultimate which the world can offer. He begins by denying sloth. He makes himself first in his class at the military school. With his backing this is unnecessary. He doesn't even have to go to school. He needs only to ask and it will be given. And this is what his fellows expect. As world opinion they are at first baffled, then outraged by his refusal.

His adventure is similar to that of John Golden-Mouth who at sixteen by divine and natural means was raised to the priesthood. John felt that he was too innocent and ignorant for his high office, and so fled into the wilderness of life where he was initiated into the experience with and final overcoming of his elemental nature, even taking on the posture of the beast. He fornicated and to save himself from this sin committed a greater, murder. Officially the sacrament is valid when given by any ordained priest, but he felt the priest should be a Knower. He refused to be merely a dignitary of the Church, just as the Supreme General in his youth refused without earning them the highest offices of officialdom. The Quartermaster, who was second to his first in class, recognized this quality of renunciation and thought him chosen to save mankind. Like Jesus he who is to become the Generalissimo disappears from the world to prepare for his high mission. He goes into the wilderness of the desert, to the command of an outpost so remote from Europe and even from the settled parts of Africa as to seem out of the world. It is a place representing the extreme opposite of what his inheritance could have given him. He commands a segment of the foreign legion, outcasts of society, whose crimes will not permit their return. The knowledge this quest brings him is this: freed of temptations, self-abnegant, he cannot free himself of man's dual

nature. He is at the fringe of the world, but the world still retains that fringe; out of it he causes the death of a man. His motive is good, officially and privately. This one death is deserved. The criminal repeats an old crime: he kills in the love act a girl. The surrender of this man will not only free society from an incorrigible criminal, but in so freeing it, society will be spared a small war. And yet this criminal is a man, and the taint of his blood is on his commander. The Quartermaster by choice relieves him, believing the crime is no crime, or that at least he will expiate it, still believing him the chosen savior. The Generalissimo now flees to the mountains, that other retreat, so remote and so above the world that one in its fastnesses scarcely knows of the world beyond and below. Here he enters a monastery (comparable to the Essenes?) surrendering any semblance of rank, denying any need of the body. And yet he is in his body, and it will not be denied. He commits adultery with a married woman, gets her with child, abandons the woman and the child in her womb and returns to the inheritance he has tried to refuse. He repeats the very crime the soldier he sacrificed committed, for the woman he abandons dies. The Generalissimo's initiation is now complete. He knows the limits of man's possibilities: that he cannot escape his nature. He has learned by the sacrifice of himself, within the limits possible to him or any man, what the old Negro preacher knows, that man by dying to himself, or even by dying, cannot save mankind or even one man from the mystery of his predicament. This is the wisdom with which he returns; and it is this which, when he is Supreme Commander, allows the absolute knowledge of what man is capable of; that is, to accept man in terms of the cooperating opposites of his nature and circumstance. When his John the Baptist, the old sickly Quartermaster General, accuses him of fearing man and betraying him, he initiates his subordinate into the truth that man betrays man always. Like the Runner the old Quartermaster has thought that by action man can resolve the insoluble. The old General says he does not fear man; he respects him. He will later tell the Corporal, his son who says man will endure, that he will do more. He will prevail.

The Sisters bring the Corporal after a long pilgrimage back to Europe, giving him a home, location, and what serves for parents.

But this parentage is a substitute. The Corporal deprived of the Cart must undertake the harsher role. His sacrifice must be complete. As the anonymous Corporal going among the soldiers inciting them to mutiny, he has already recovered certain of the qualities of fatherhood, all but the actual physical bond. From him the privates receive hope of release from the evils of their plight; he comforts them; he redresses social ills; he promises marriage to a whore, gives status to her outcast state; he arranges the marriage between a soldier and a girl with child by him, thus assuring to the unborn child a father in the flesh. He does this with the knowledge of the risk he takes, the final test of fatherhood, sacrifice of self for the child. So far the Son of Man becomes the Father of Man. His next to last test parallels the temptation on the Mount. The old Supreme General takes his son above the town and offers him the world. The old man understands the full measure of the sacrifice of his own youth, now that he is deprived by age and is near to death. This makes authoritative his plea that breath is worth the sacrifice, that life is its own boon, the sorrows as well as the good. This is the same revelation the song of the bird announces to the criminal about to be hanged in America. This revelation is the central kernel of meaning to *A Fable*. Yet the Corporal is offered not only life but life in abundance. The offer is accompanied by a price: betrayal. This the son refuses; but as the two part, the Corporal thinks father and son have perfected their reunion, that the guilt of innocence is expiated at last. He says, "Father," as they part forever. Sir Launcelot of the Lake has become Sir Galahad of the Baptismal Fount. But not quite. The old General knows there is one more test. He warns his son of the blood with which he resists him. The Corporal dies the death, but in dying reaffirms the old primordial flaw. He repeats his father's adventure in the desert. He cannot die immaculate, only in the stain of Gragnon's assassination. This is the insoluble antinomy, the sacred paradox. Both father and son thus suffer the double role of priest and murderer. The Corporal rather than betray man's hope in salvation accepts the role but now with full knowledge. This junction of relationship between the Corporal and Gragnon is the union of worldly and spiritual rank, but only the rank will be resurrected as symbol of no body, only hope. The old General

opposes the highest sacrifice to the lowest: the highest possibilities against mere breath. Out of this did the Corporal come to be, did the old drama repeat itself. The perfect reunion between father and son is denied; but hope of it is renewed; and in the end, in the terms of this dualism which makes all plights common and degree meaningless, man will not only endure, he will prevail; and this is mortal immortality. To such an extent is the divine understanding of the Passion week reduced.

In the section called *Tomorrow* it seems for a moment that the wisdom which keeps order in the world and the hope for man's return to the innocence of Paradise will be reunited in death. The Corporal is the unknown soldier. The perpetual flame of hope burns above him in the triumphal arch. The old General, now dead, in all the pomp and circumstance of high degree and the pageantry of the death cart, but the death cart resurrected in glory, is brought before the son for the revelation of their final reunion in death. That hope of bringing to an end the evils of man's condition, and that knowledge that it persists in terms of the eternal quest, for which Fatherland is the symbol, join together in the eye of the mass man lining the way. In this common eye only the symbol of the Father is apotheosized.

But at this moment the Runner steps forth from the crowd. When the Corporal was arrested, when the higher purpose failed, he turned to the Jockey-Sentry, who was reborn into a cynical sense of brotherhood, instinct become superstition, believing in blind chance (who holds his outfit in the palm of his hand as banker through whom the men gamble their lives against the temporary spree of military leave: life against the body's basic needs). In a sense the Jockey-Sentry has exchanged attitudes with the Runner: he hates man in himself and in others. Like the German general he uses men for his gamble with lives, practicing Mama Bidet's concept, his hatred almost as abstract as the German's attitude. He at first kicks in the teeth of the Runner when the Runner tries to tempt him to a noble risk. Having lost any belief in spiritual or any kind of salvation, he refuses to listen to the Runner who tells him that if he will only take his men over the top, the enemy will come out, too, and man acting in the mass will thwart the Generals of both sides (man's common enemy) and bring the conflict to an end. He has tried already to defeat

authority and has failed. The old Negro has followed him to France, as the friendly comforter from all the world to all the world, but he will have nothing more to do with him. This is his situation. Having used gambling as a means to an end in the horse race episode, he now uses it as the symbol of the end itself. The Runner, who believes that the end justifies the means, understanding the common man's belief in signs (the dice and the Mason's sign), will force the Jockey-Sentry, who controls both, to save himself and mankind. The Runner uses violence to end violence (again the paradox), even fooling himself and the old Negro with the fire and the roar of the artillery as signs of the coming of the end. At the point of the gun he forces the Sentry over the top; men from both sides come forward in brotherhood. But it is too late. The Generals have got together. A barrage from both sides turned not upon an enemy but upon man, destroys them. The Sentry, dying, cries we instead of I. This is his final test, the dying of selfhood which becomes a resurrection into the brotherhood of man.

It is with the knowledge of this failure which is also a triumph that the Runner, who has survived it, lunges out of the mass and casts the military medal at the old Marshall's death cart, defying and denying the symbolic reunion of Father-Son, reaffirming the hope of man that Paradise can be brought to earth. Except for the police, the emblem of authority, he would be torn to pieces by the man in mass, again forced by him to recognize the hope of man's relief from the dualism of his nature. He appears to be not a man now but an upright scar, one arm, one leg, one eye, on crutches, in his being death in life and life in death, the walking representation of the dualism and man's hope that he can end it. The book closes with him in the arms of the Old Quartermaster General. The two levels of action are thus joined not in terms of the saviors but of the John the Baptists, the one weeping for lost hope, the other with little more than breath defiantly affirming the immortality of hope. It is because of this hope, at some far distant time in the future, that man will prevail. How and under what conditions Faulkner does not tell us.

"This passion, this immolation, this apotheosis" has always been Faulkner's subject. It has never before been so explicitly stated. The insistence on endurance as the measure of immortality in

mortal man is a stoical attitude that appears in late stages of civilization. Whatever virtues it lends to behavior it remains a naturalistic interpretation of man's predicament. Jesus is either divine or he stands for an archetypical performance, the essence of which remains in man's consciousness to be repeated again, say in the twentieth century at the time of a false spring armistice in a world war. *A Fable* takes all the circumstance of the Passion week's progress, repeats it by reducing it to a natural explanation. There is a savior with twelve disciples, a Judas, a last supper, a barbed wire substitute for the crown of thorns (this must have seemed a little forced even to the author); there is even a corpse shifted by gunfire for resurrection. Now characters in life or fiction, knowing the Passion, might conceivably try to reproduce it under certain stimuli. But neither in life nor in fiction can they repeat the initial circumstances by means of which the Passion was acted out, for these are beyond control. And yet the author does this. The reader asks, upon what authority? Certainly upon no historic authority, for history may repeat itself but never under the same set of conditions. Does the author in the episode of the three witnesses who have seen the Corporal die in three different times and places imply a supernatural resurrection? It seems so, until we remember that the Corporal is the old General's bastard. Is it a supernatural manifestation, or is it accidental resemblance? We cannot know. From this failure to solve the basic technical problem of authority the author impairs and renders ambiguous his meaning. And hence his form.

What is the form of *A Fable*? It sometimes seems to be a morality, sometimes an allegory, sometimes fiction. The characters are differentiated by the degree in which they represent this version of the Passion, not as men who differ in their personalities. As mouthpieces of Faulkner's rhetoric they are so far allegorical. The clearest instance of this is Marthe's impassioned denunciation of the old General. Her station and upbringing is not such as to lead us to accept what we hear her say. Is she speaking under some supernatural influence? This can't be, for the whole message of the book denies the supernatural. The long oration about Sambo in *Intruder in the Dust* seemed to be the author's voice; and yet there it was put into the mouth of a lawyer who conceivably would have thought such thoughts and have

been able so to express them. But Marthe is a peasant woman and furthermore a mountain woman, and mountain women are notoriously silent and subservient before men. And where did she get her training in diction? Nor is the Corporal ever seen as a person. Even the *ficelles* who talk about him do so in terms of the mystery which he is supposed to be. He is no Son of Man. He is begot of the sound of the author's voice upon an idea. This makes the great scene above the city between father and son miscarry, for there is no son but an abstraction to be tempted. In spite of the variety of the General's plea it never quite has the human warmth of a parent trying to save his child. The accidental machinery of another drama intrudes to divert the reader, who perforce must think of the temptation on the Mount or find himself wondering if the old General stands for both God and devil. Anything which diverts the attention from a scene, which destroys the illusion of action, is a fictive flaw, for it makes the reader aware that he is reading. God made incarnate in man cried out as man, in the prayer to have the cup removed and again on the Cross. And yet Faulkner is dealing with the natural man and that only. Surely he should have given him flesh and the body's needs. Action should never be resolved in symbolic terms only. Reality and symbol should fit as the glove the hand. He sacrificed too much to inducing mystery about the Corporal's movements, all of which is reported. He is in the death cart with his disciples, passing rapidly, making a heroic posture. And in the scene of the last supper there is felt the strain of effort to make him a human being with other human beings, but this comes late and even here the arbitrary "plot" again intrudes to divert the attention. And to inhibit the creative act. It isn't as if Faulkner doesn't know how to do it. The shock of meaning in terms of mystery he handled superbly well in *The Bear*. The concrete footprint disappearing before the boy's eyes made present the invisible bear, evoking the awe of the immortal in the mortal beast. The print of the foot vanishing in the swamp's water, two objects acting together in one image, is one of the finest examples in fiction of Flaubert's law that an object exists because it stands in relationship to another object or objects. There is none of James's weak specification here, nor in that other instance when the bear, again invisible, looks at the boy out of the forest's screen. How does he

do it here? By having the bird suddenly grow silent. The sudden cessation of sound produces the silence because it affects the boy. The very fact that it is a bird which in no way can be harmed by the bear makes the ominous quality of the danger immediate. In the first episode sight and touch are used; in the second sight and sound, sound against silence, sight complicated because it is blind. It is sight which doesn't see opposed to the seeing bear, itself unseen, that gives the shock of awe and terror. All of these specifications are made by the boy's mind out of the legend of the bear's immortality, fixed in a crooked paw, which the author has carefully established.

This comparison is relevant, because Ike McCaslin is cousin-german to the Corporal. He undergoes a self-immolation, refusing his inheritance to rectify the sins of the fathers. By his act of renunciation the taint is removed at least from his private conscience; its self-victimage shows the way to regeneration. But he is no abstract symbol. He is a believable individual, of a certain heritage, in a certain time and place, acting among individuals who perform out of the mores of a society and the particular ritual of the hunt. Furthermore the sincerity of his belief and his sacrifice is accepted, because we see, are not told about, but see what it costs him in the scene in the boarding house at high noon when his wife offers her naked body, a renunciation of her modesty, the measure of her desperation, for the sake of a communion of real marriage. And marriage as an institution is certainly strengthened by the physical location in property, as the personal communion is fixed in the sensible joining of flesh. Young Ike is the exemplum of the Puritan hero, who holds in fee simple the body of the world, and is incapable, as are all men, of this responsibility. To this is owed his unconscious guilt which makes him reject the inheritance. The old Christian order of a God's Wealth which gave to the divinity the ownership of the world had in his day become a commonwealth. Action always comes down to the individual. The rejection of the social body required the sensible rejection of his own. His father and twin brother tried to correct the injustice by a social sacrifice, which was also symbolic, of moving into the cabin and putting the slaves in the Big House. But this was a compromise between social responsibility for property and the injustice it entails. The

ritualized chase of their half brother—emphasized by the formality of the necktie—in which he was never caught shows the perpetual recurrence of the dualism, which became the enveloping action for Ike's own specific act of renunciation. Man's plight and his effort to do something about it appear in *Go Down, Moses* as they appear in *A Fable*: the enveloping action and the action proper. The pursuit of the mulatto brother causes the "fall" of Ike's father and the renewal of the conflict in Ike's birth, just as the "fall" of the old General begets the Corporal. But *The Bear* deals only with card twelve, the surrender of social position. The poker game is essentially the same as the dice game in the horse episode with the Jockey, a means to an end. It has not become the end in itself as in the later stages of *A Fable*. The woman as the root of all evil, because pursuit of her involves the use of the senses, is the Puritan attitude; but she has only symbolic reality in this last book. Perhaps when she disappears entirely, then will the son complete his reunion with the father. But card thirteen turns for many of Faulkner's heroes: Christmas and Quentin and Bayard's grandson, for example. Bayard himself risks his physical life to put an end to violence and gains a moral triumph. For him there is the ram in the bushes; but as I shall try to show, his action is no resolution. The old dilemma remains.

In these previous novels there was generally, in technical terms, a fusion of the action proper and the rhetoric. The rhetoric at its best was an impassioned reverie, sometimes spoken, sometimes in the consciousness as on a stage. It was made authoritative by having it depend not upon the author's voice commenting out of some omniscience but by attaching it to the characters in their fictive parts. At times in *Sartoris* and in *Sanctuary* the author intrudes his omniscience, but it is restricted, as if the author were deliberately trying to avoid reporting the action instead of making the action reveal itself. Even in "A Rose for Emily," before he had more surely mastered the form, the Voice of the Town narrating is strictly a local boy. He might have been a particular individual, sensitive and apperceptive, who saw Miss Emily not as a symbol but as an individual whose private situation gave symbolic meaning to the more general predicament of the town. Nor did he depend upon the symbol alone to make the resolution. He made the image of the indented pillow and the

gray hair beside the skeleton of lost love do it, just as earlier the odor of decay came from the desperate act of her private anguish. The dual nature of the central intelligence, while making the action show itself, also served for a choral effect, revealing, commenting upon, extending the violence into a larger context of meaning. He has perfected since the techne of this point of view, but "A Rose for Emily" is instructive for showing it in a cruder form. Not that the story is unskillfully done.

The post he has come to take is a variant of James's, and his use of the senses is nearly always as skillful as Flaubert's. What is unique to him is a kind of bardic quality and tone, modified by the incantatory homiletics of protestant rhetoric. The bard tells the well-known story but known incompletely until he brings all fragments into their true relationship, thus revealing the fuller truth in the mold created by his greater talent and knowledge. It is why Faulkner can begin anywhere, often in the middle, and work in any direction. His temper of suspense is dependent upon this. It implies on the part of those involved a passionate but obscure understanding, and on the part of the central intelligence the focus by which the meaning of the action will be disclosed and made whole; or the intention, also the compelling need, of the central intelligence to unravel it. He becomes the interpreter with special insight as the sewing-machine agent in *The Hamlet*. Or he is Quentin in *Absalom, Absalom!* who must find out the secret of the dark violence in his community out of a compulsive sense of his close communion with it. He feels a responsibility where the action of a part involves the destiny of the whole, of which he is another part. He hopes from the understanding he will get to inform him of his own dark nature, explain himself to himself in terms of the common social scene; and in so doing perhaps regenerate it. His quest is a full measure of participation. This quest explains why so many of Faulkner's protagonists, when they hold the point of view, become victims, at times selected, at times self-appointed. They have only gradually worked up to the role of the archetypal savior, as is to be found in *A Fable*. The irony and disaster of Quentin's search is that he failed upon the larger scene; or perhaps it was no failure but a revelation that he could only die to save his immediate family. The force of the irony lay in the impotence of his act. The

spiritual impotence of suicide is only another, if more conscious, reflection of the family's spiritual decay.

Faulkner's roving point of view, placed now with one person, now with another, with the author above or looking over the shoulder, is not a shift of view but segmented cones depending from an intense point or core. So it is that the action proper in one part becomes the enveloping action for another. The opening section, for example, of *Absalom, Absalom!* has Rosa Coldfield for protagonist. The fury she feels from the treatment she has received makes for the intensity of her denunciation, a vocal reverie. This reverie contains an action complete as far as it affects her, but to Quentin it is the enveloping action against which he finally hammers out a truth; that is, her action contains in essence the enveloping action which is Sutpen, but not until the other stories are unravelled will it show itself to Quentin as a part of the pattern which at the same time has all the ingredients of the whole. This is another way of saying how the gradual disclosure makes for suspense.

The extreme extension of the bardic tone, as it is the most instinctive, belongs to his mobs. They seem to act out of a blind understanding but with the force of mass and the incorruptibility of a natural movement which is beyond good and evil. There is nobody writing today who can handle crowds of people so well as he. And there is nobody except Tolstoy in the past who has done it so well. Tolstoy always does it by focusing mass action upon an individual, or it is seen through and felt by one seeing eye. Faulkner at his best does this, too. He has a spokesman for the chorus but the chorus, unlike Tolstoy's, has a life of its own, indeed almost a personality, at once physical and metaphysical. In the opening of *A Fable* he uses it well, inducing mystery and suspense. We don't know who the individuals who step out from the crowd are, or what the Sergeant represents; but at this point we don't need to know. Unfortunately, later the suspense lags and the mobs grow monotonous, and there is a reason for this. It will best be seen by examining his best mob action, which appears in *The Unvanquished*, one of his most successful and least understood books. The uprooted slaves going along the roads and woods to Jordan are a technical triumph. They represent the hope of earthly paradise and the loosing of chaos, all those

elemental forces which an ordered society keeps in place by ethics, a code of morals and manners. Society can solve none of the repetitive involvements which are man's plight and inheritance. It can only hold in abeyance the most destructive aspects of these forces by rules and orders, accepted habits and the convention of property. The animal nature of man is transformed by form into what is called civilized behavior. There is restricted war and total war, the first a convention of the Christian state, the other the freeing of violence which will destroy the state. Such violence allows for no sanctuary. The Civil War was the first western war to do this. (Napoleon only partially did it.) It was instituted by Yankee generals. Historically the moment is clear: when Buell and McClellan were replaced by Grant and Sherman. Previously the convention, certainly the eighteenth-century convention which Lee followed, was that armies fought armies; that the population would of necessity be injured. But when Sherman said war was hell, aside from admitting an incapacity to defeat the Confederate armies in the field, he meant specifically that there would be no Sanctuary, that the entire society would be destroyed. At war's end the forms would be no longer the same. He began it in Mississippi; so the scene for *The Unvanquished* is not only right dramatically. It is right, too, historically.

Rosa Millard, the protagonist, in her person opposes all the moral and ethical mores of Protestant Christian life to the loosing of these forces of total war. She does not consciously see the war for what it is. To her it is the usual folly of man raised to its highest power. Her silver and mules and Negroes have been stolen, not levied upon formally as the articles of war allowed as late as the Revolution. She sets out to the proper authority to get them back, on the assumption that it is a crime against property. And Colonel Dickey among the enemy shares her attitude, but with greater knowledge. Her failure to see the actual state of affairs is made clear by her actions. She sends for a more formal hat, since her call is to be formal; she "borrows" the team; she carries rose cuttings, as if everything was going on as usual; she makes the boys wash out their mouths with soap when they lie or use profanity. This is the usage of social order, small evidences of manners and ethics of the decent behavior she knows. It is comedy but it becomes a grim irony as the action progresses.

More and more the nature of the war shows itself. Her house is burned along with others. The success of her mission sows the seed for her destruction, which symbolically foreshows what total war will do to the civilized order. Gradually she is forced to violate her moral code out of the ambiguity of her situation, and except for her last act for the better reason. This contradiction between means and ends finally brings her to her death. There could be no finer image to focus the meaning of her action than in the appearance of her body in death. She looks like a few thin sticks with a piece of calico thrown over them. This image makes a shocking revelation, in the apposition of spirit and body, in terms of her fall.

The uprooted slaves moving in mass towards Jordan and freedom, towards that deep-laid hope of paradise on earth but to the actual betrayal of death, also represent the destruction of the society of which they are a basic part. Putting Rosa Millard and the boys in the midst of this mob allows the chorus to make an implicit comment on her quest. Her personal fate and the fate of what she stands for is foreshadowed. But like all tragic figures she is blind to it. To her it is another evidence of the folly she expects. She is outraged when it engulfs her and sweeps her into the river. Her impotence before it, the release of chaos in man joined to the natural chaos of nature, the river, is in the umbrella which she lays about her. But she is not allowed to drown like the characters of a lower order. The strength of her moral nature demands a longer struggle. All the five senses are used to give effect to the mob, to relate it to the protagonists in the wagon. They hear it moving in its mysterious power, but most of all they smell it. Smell of all the senses is most mortal. The dust the mob raises overlays them, a symbol of death, making a composite effect in sight, touch, taste, and smell. Sight is used to make present the human, individual delusion. As in the Pied Piper of Hamelin, one falls behind. A mother and child cannot keep up. In her human frailty and blindness is foreshadowed the self-betrayal and the hope of the mass. Rosa says, Why don't you go home? The Negro woman can't go home. The gleam she follows, like the children of Hamelin, has already destroyed it. Rosa is blind, too. The two blindnesses complement each other as they expose the meaning.

In *The Unvanquished* you have practically the same impulses, the same motives for action, prototypes for the heroes, as you do in *A Fable*. The grandmother and the Generalissimo, out of differing knowledge, both stand for order in the state. The enveloping action is total war. It is this which not only destroys the rank and place of great and small, but it is against this that the private actions of the succeeding protagonists, grandmother and grandson, of resisting and restoring the shattered forms by the risk of self, take place. The bushwhackers who kill the grandmother have for leader a man whose costume is a parody of that of a gentleman, representing the release of the forces of chaos, made sinister by the inversion of the form of leadership. In terms of him Ab Snopes becomes a force of evil only after he has been able to tempt the grandmother. The boys in pursuit of the murderer give death for death, but the act of vengeance, in spite of its motive, is private and dangerously close to chaos itself. But Colonel Sartoris is the archetype of the leader whose rank has been subverted by the triumph of total war. He is closer now to the parody of the gentleman bushwhacker than he is to his former self. He is the traditional leader changed by war into the leader who makes his private will into the law. The race of the two engines, which seemed to the boys a chivalric tilting, becomes in his hands the image of private, irresponsible power. The railroad is the instrument which will prevent the re-establishment of the family in some location, although it is the motor car and the airplane which will later more successfully set individuals adrift upon the earth and above it. The uprooting finds its clearest image in what is done to womankind. Drusilla realizes that her role as sweetheart, wife and mother, the formal succession of woman's roles in the family order, will disappear. In dressing and fighting as a man she symbolically unsexes herself. The grandmothers refuse to believe the heroism of her act. In their choral role they carry on the resistance against the disruption of society's form for which one grandmother died by forcing upon Drusilla a loveless marriage to Colonel Sartoris. The futility of their act, their failure to recognize what has happened, is the travesty of the marriage itself, delayed by an action of two private interests, each taking the law into its own hands, the carpetbaggers and the defeated, no longer acting as soldiers out of

some formal obedience to the state but out of a private sense of injustice and betrayal. The irony is completed in Drusilla's dress of the wedding gown over the unsexed soldier riding as one of her husband's men. The final betrayal of family takes a critical turn in the incestuous attraction between stepmother and son, which the father cannot even hear for his self-absorption in his private violence. Colonel Sartoris frees himself, out of weariness, by death. His son, Bayard, refuses the pistols offered in the odor of verbena, violence identified with love, and becomes a moral man in the double denial of love and physical life. The enemy misfires and he wins life, but ironically, as is seen in *Sartoris*, there is no longer any clear convention which can contain and give it meaning.

Although *A Fable* and *The Unvanquished* are dealing essentially with the dualism of good and evil in terms of total war and man's effort to resolve it, there are crucial differences in the technical handling of the two books. It seems to me that action in a novel must rely upon the social conventions. No action takes place in a vacuum. It is always somewhere. Even if it is in the mind, the mind reflects the images of life. It is the convention, whether it be of manners or morals, which restrains the natural man and makes that which is common to all men (the elemental forces) take the varying shapes of a particular culture, the source of which is some religious belief. The loss of this belief is always in evidence through the fragmentation of the convention. The fragmentation of the convention has been Faulkner's convention of the enveloping action in books previous to *A Fable*. But in this book he treats too specifically of Everyman, no particular men. The trench is a symbol without a natural counterpart. We are told of the ordure and the sweat; we are not made to smell or suffer it. We are told we are in France. We see no Frenchmen. This is one reason the mass action grows monotonous. We are told men sacrifice their rank, what is dearest even to life itself, but only with the young airman in Europe is this rank made concrete. And this is done by use of the senses. We see the phosphorous bullet strike his uniform, the mark of his rank and his belief; we smell the slow burning of it, which becomes the sensible focus of betrayal, and its slow smell of disintegration is always there as the specific reference for his revery. In America the author is equally

successful with the horse race. When the great scenes which center around the old Generalissimo become scenes, it is because of what the eunuched staff officer does with the door or what Faulkner does with the old batman. This servant stands for loyalty, but a human relationship is established between the two men. It is the batman's presence in the death cortege, a human being who is also a symbol, which helps make the pageantry visual. The young airman, the old General, the Negro, and the Jockey-Sentry more nearly take on the particularity of people. Therefore when they appear, we more nearly get fiction.

But I rather feel the total impact is that of a morality. An author can take what form he chooses, to say what he pleases; but certain literary forms are more successful in one period than another. Our sense of history, for example, would not have been understood in the twelfth century. I rather imagine that in the twelfth century genealogy expressed in dynastic terms whatever sense there was of history. But perhaps its most explicit form was that of a memoir such as Joinville's, which implied the soul's trials and self-discovery in terms of its religious belief. War had its natural side then as now, but war, foreign and domestic, existed as a specific kind of action reflecting the image of religious man. There was no disparity between economic man and religious man. When the king was counting losses after a certain battle in the holy land and he asked of his brother, he was told, "Sire, he is in Paradise."

And so it seems that a morality, or an allegory, whose materials are mortal sins and moral principles, and not the uniqueness of individual men, could make a better effect in an age of belief, because this belief suffused all degrees of rank and particularity. A man witnessing a morality would, in the action dealing with the drama of the soul, automatically specify whatever was unique and personal in himself. But today where we have conventions empty of belief and institutions being reduced to organizations and forms which have lost the natural object, a morality lacks authority. It is why fiction as a literary form appears now and not in the fourteenth century. Everyman now must first become unique man. He is no longer composite of spiritual and natural parts, related and defined against an absolute set of values. The

fiction writer can best recover him through the artful use of the sensibility of naturalism. This is what Flaubert learned after the *Temptation of St. Anthony*. (*A Fable* is Faulkner's *St. Anthony*, or Tolstoyan *Resurrection*.) It is why the natural man discovers himself in opposition to the conventions. He is in search of that which will contain him, and what can contain him is fragmentary, the broken artifacts of a culture.

If I had to sum up in a sentence what I think of *A Fable*'s technical limitation, I would say that the author's omniscient viewpoint has used his rhetorical gifts to report the action instead of using the rhetoric, as previously, to extend the meaning of the action's violence, thus depriving himself of that extra dimension which his subject needs for its fullest rendition. An artist has only one subject. It does not come to him full-clothed and apparent, else there would be no travail, no delight, no creation. He spends his life in an enforced discovery, so that in the end the objects of his imagination will be set in the proper relationships to each other and his vision appear whole, to himself as well as to the reader. This, at least, is the ideal situation, that shock of recognition which joins the observer to the observed in a renewed understanding of the common predicament, or some aspect of it. The stale becomes fresh, the old, new. This regeneration the artist performs for society. This is not to say that he alone knows such an experience. The great oak puts forth each spring a leaf as tender as that first leaf upon the switch whose roots still know the rotting seed. So do most men make according to their skills. The artist does not pre-empt the creative act. He confirms it by turning chaos into the labyrinth. And this only the great artificer can do. And he can do it, because he has confronted his dual nature, accepted and assimilated the beast, and so out of this knowledge can make the lair to contain him. Without the knowledge of evil and its place in the divine scheme, there is no life. The innocent try to exclude from themselves the possibilities of evil. This is the universal meaning of the young airman's fate in *A Fable*. Instead of doing as Bridesman must earlier have done, come to terms with the complexities of the world, he could not stand the violation of the illusion of his innocence and so, being honest and courageous, there was

nothing left for him to do but kill himself and choose the latrine, symbolic of what he had refused to confront, as the place of suicide.

This is the self-betrayal which denies maturity. Theseus, that other hero-innocent, made the second error of immaturity. He thought he could dispose of evil once for all. It was not by accident that he killed the Minotaur in its sleep. This condemned him to the wanderings of perpetual immaturity. The knowledge of himself forever denied him by his refusal to confront the beast lurked in his unconscious to become the ruin of friends and loves. How quickly Ariadne was betrayed! The black sails which plunged his father to his death foreshow the nature of his quest. Incapable of mature love (and this is best defined in man-woman involvement, rather than father and son) because of his refusal to know himself, he must go on to the end, to exile, murdered by his host once a friend, seeking what he has refused, with the bones of wife, father, and son to mark his way.

The labyrinth we inherit from that other source of our common culture. It is a myth particularly instructive for artists. Daedalus and Icarus inform us of another meaning to be got from the father-son myth. They make another pair of criminals, but the guilt this time is the father's. Because the labyrinth is his handiwork, he can offer the thread of understanding to all men. The intercessor is a woman. The state in the person of the king would have him subvert to an arbitrary political end his knowledge and his devotion. The King imprisons him within his artifice. But like all arbitrary power it is stupid. Knowing the limitations of his craft, Daedalus found the way out. The nature of an artist is composite of an Icarean recklessness, the pushing of matter beyond its limits, and restraint. The medium of a craft is always waxen; it is the limits of form which give it flight. It was Daedalus, who did not forget the limits of his craft, who kept his course.



Regeneration For the Man

IN THIS NOVEL Faulkner has taken a subject, and almost it seems deliberately taken it, which the propagandists of the party line have pre-empted as theirs to have and to hold and fulminate about; or for that matter, any of the intruders upon the art of fiction who violate the Muse for pragmatic purposes, whether at the state's command, or out of private need, or through sociology's quasi-revelations.¹ These last pretend to illuminate situation and performance, but, in effect, by meddling with the craft, obfuscate even their debased cult of good works. It is irrelevant, actually, whether Faulkner either out of irony or from some more private impulse chose what seems a current issue as subject for this novel. Such choice is beyond the artist's capacity. He does not choose his subject; his subject chooses him. And because his imagination functions in a certain way, craft against reverie, even if he deliberately set out to make a plea to action, or to treat

¹ *Intruder in the Dust* by William Faulkner.

the accidental accidentally, he wouldn't be able to do it. The artist is simply one who cannot debase his work even when, pressed, he thinks he gives in to circumstance; certainly not after his apprenticeship is behind him. There always seem to be a few exceptions to prove the rule; but on close scrutiny I doubt if these could show more than a technical virtuosity such as magic shows.

Dickens' passionate interest in the social evils of his day and *Bleak House*, that one of his books which stirred England to reform the Courts in Chancery, together give the best example I know of the artist's inviolability. The excitement of the day and the social action *Bleak House* set afoot were residual to the central experience, the literary truth, of the novel. It happened that the injustices of the Courts in Chancery served Dickens as the complication which discovered his subject. The effect of the inertia, the circumlocutions, the mazelike ritual of the Court upon the characters, gave to its injustice the absolute quality of Fate with which man struggles but about which he can do little but realize the combinations of his character against circumstance; so that the proportion of good and evil in the nature of man is implied in all its variety through the central drive of the action. If Dickens' concern had been with the evils of banking, say, instead of the cases in Chancery, the literary truth would have been the same. The book would merely have lacked the residual effect of reforming the banking system, which at that time the public interest had not identified with its sorrows. The artist may use anything, since whatever he uses will be absorbed by his imagination and rendered by his technical skill, and this is the artist's integrity. He will only use what his vision sees, and that according to the degree of its intensity. The surface and density of the object, illuminated in its totality, is form. Whatever failure there is is a failure of human fallibility, not of intention.

Intruder in the Dust bears comparison with *Bleak House*, with the difference that Dickens' concern is with a single institution while Faulkner deals with the complex and fundamental involvement of a whole society. The supposed murder of a white man by a Negro, a threat of lynching, and even the bill of rights, which certainly brings the material up to the moment, has all the appearance of being the author's subject; but actually this is only one aspect of it. In the first paragraph Faulkner reports sparingly,

tersely even, an act of violence. At noon the high sheriff has reached the jail with Lucas Beauchamp, although the entire county has known since the night before that Lucas killed a white man. The act of violence has already happened. But the pastness of it is not static. There is a continuum in the information about the spread of the news; and given the particular kind of news it is and the lapse of time between the murder and the jailing of Lucas we are made to feel a mounting suspense which gives to the delay, as the story unfolds, a quality of mystery. This suspense and a feeling of the dark unknown is further tightened by the emphasis on time, not any hour but the hour of noon, a crucial division of time which we sense will be of importance, if for no more than that the narrow limits it suggests will contain the action. That it also will imply a symbolical reference we cannot know but later find ourselves prepared for. This introduces us to the structure. Instead of leading up to the murder as the final release to the tensions of involvement, by putting it into the past Faulkner uses the act as the compulsive force to catalyze the disparate fragments of appearance into reality, for the story is not about violence at all. It is about a sixteen-year-old boy's education in good and evil and his effort to preserve his spiritual integrity.

Charles Mallison, Jr. (he is called by name once) is not merely a sensitive boy in whom resides the consciousness of his race, although he is this, too. More particularly he has a grief. The cause for this grief comes out of the dichotomy between the races, brought about by the long assault from the outside which has isolated Southern people and made him, along with them, overly sensitive to his racial distinction, to the extent that the integrity of his manhood has become identified with his distinction. This identification between race and manhood represents for the boy-man both Nemesis and Fate, since he is neither responsible for the imperfection of his view nor for the pattern of the action which the dead white man releases. He resists flight (washing his hands of it). His effort to escape his predicament lies in his decision to discover the truth by digging up the grave of the dead man to see what bullet killed him. He will face dangers both physical and metaphysical comprised in an undertaking beyond his capacity to perform, but in his decision he assumes the moral responsibility for his humanity. The impulse behind this

decision, however, is mixed. On the one hand he hopes to wipe out the shame his manhood has suffered at the attitude of Lucas four years before the story opens (Lucas's denial of his racial preeminence; or so it seemed); on the other, it is to avoid the shame of lynching that attaches to any mob action, since this is another kind of emasculation both for the individual and society, as in either case the will is deprived of its function. Or, to put it another way, the individual's violation of his code of conduct and society's subversion of its laws become a kind of suicide; especially in the instance of traditional man and a homogeneous society. It is his innocence as a boy but his pride and conscience as man which in the end clarify the confused impulses and bring him into a fuller knowledge of the truth. In one sense the historic isolation of the Southern culture by a victorious and hostile force serves for the fateful drive of the story: is at once the cause for action and the clue to its meaning. By focusing it in the moral destiny of a boy, the story becomes dramatic instead of didactic: that is, a novel and not propaganda.

There is for any Southern writer of imagination an inescapable preoccupation with his native scene and especially with its historic predicament. He can no more escape it than a Renaissance painter could escape painting Her Ladyship the Virgin and the Court of Angels. He has been made to feel too sharply his uniqueness and the uniqueness of his society in the modern world. His self-consciousness does for him what blindness did for Homer. He has been forced to achieve aesthetic distance. It is this which gives to the boy protagonist in this book the authority for his undertaking (a cult hero almost) and allows him to absorb into the working out of his fate for the entire complex set of relationships which represent the contradictions, the mixed virtues and vices, the agonies even of the Southern sensibility, containing a vision at once objective and involved: the poet-prophet who defines a civilization bereft of historic destiny but which refuses the role.

It seems to me that criticism all too often attempts to isolate an author's truth by abstracting it from the context of his performance. It is the writer's nature to discover for himself his meaning by matching his knowledge of experience against his imagination. This never comes in a burst of light, but out of a gradual exploration into the dark places of the mind and heart of man.

The process of writing forces the discovery; or rather it is the discovery. What saves the writer from losing himself (the points of darkness are infinite) is his point of view. To this he may return and by this he may relate, reduce, and absorb the seemingly unrelated matters of experience until they become what to him is truth. Given the creative function, what follows is style; and style is that breath of life which makes of texture and structure, or body and bone, an organic whole. In this novel Faulkner has achieved a oneness of style and point of view which is of the first order of literary distinction. It is all effortless and so fused (which has not always been the case in his other books—he has not always removed his scaffolding) that to probe for purposes of analysis becomes a kind of bloody operation.

I shall let the point of view more or less envelop what I have to say. It lies in the close sympathy which exists between the boy and his uncle, a sympathy so intimate that at times the transference of thought does not need speech. There are many advantages to this. The novel is freed, but not entirely so, from the indistinct image the narrator-actor must present to the reader. By having two sensibilities instead of one—he would have done better had he made them more personally distinct—each is able to give to the other the grace of humanity. The boy's innocence and the uncle's maturity set up an interplay both at the center and on the periphery of the structure. Their relationship becomes strophe and antistrophe, enforcing the formal pause, defining the action as it is taking place. The center of the structure depends upon the treatment of time. For the physical action a very narrow limit is set; but the physical action, while performing at its own level, releases the flow of reverie and comment which becomes the embodiment of the intrinsic meaning. Since within this area lies the realm of truth, where all is timeless, the dual consciousness moves through past, present, and even into the future, according to the needs of the particular stage of the story's development. But for this flexibility the continuous beat of the prose would grow monotonous—with its inversions and parentheses, and the dream-like quality of its tone (again the sense of timelessness) often threatening to make the skill of its complex delivery too apparent, which would be fatal. But always at the right moment there comes the pause, the break of dialogue—and Faulkner's dialogue surpasses itself—the added information when it is needed,

or the image in a new light subtly changing the texture, or the posturing of a character as sudden as the shock of the tragic mask.

Gradually as we come to understand the achievement of the boy's education, and the achievement is manhood, we discover that the point of view has not shifted but was more inclusive than it first appeared. It is still posted firmly with the boy-uncle relationship, but it has expanded beyond the boy's discoveries, though still contingent upon them. It rests at last not upon the boy's coming into manhood, but upon manhood, or its essence: The Man. The boy set out to restore a spurious manhood (appearance), but thanks to his innocence and the guidance of his uncle reaches instead true manhood (reality). The Man is the representative of the homogeneous society. His symbol is the fire and the hearth. He maintains the right relationships between the sexes, preserving to each his natural function; guards the blood's purity; is ultimately responsible for order in his household and therefore in the state; attends to his business, does not intrude or allow intrusion. He punishes and rewards toward this end and is the trustee for the earth out of which life comes and by which it is maintained. He, not Freedom which history has shown no man can stand, is the realizable image for society.

But in the South as it is now there are half men or men hamstrung out of their instinct to preserve this manhood. The uncle who understands so much is blinded by "the facts and circumstances." The sheriff, the hunter who guards the jail for five dollars as he reads the funnies, the jailkeeper who is outraged that he may lose his life for seventy-five dollars a month but will still risk it, and the old Gowrie, the father of the murdered man, are all men in Faulkner's sense, but each is circumscribed by some phase of the South's darkened image. In Miss Habersham's action the functions of the sexes are transposed. She, an old woman, does what a man should have done, if it had to be done, dig up a grave at midnight for justice's sake. And yet she was the only one who could assist the boys. Her caste and feminine intuition both informed her beforehand of what she would find, intuition acting truly, her caste function misplaced: she, a lady peddling eggs and vegetables at the town's back doors, wearing Sears-Roebuck dresses, but thirty-dollar handmade shoes and fourteen-dollar gloves—symbols of gentility, whereas the dress was not and therefore could represent her economic status. But slavery or any

like subordination is the specific image of emasculation. The South's hope for regeneration lies in its struggle itself to restore, not from outside pressure, to that part of its population the rights of manhood of which it is deprived. Understanding of this is proof of the boy's initiation and his right to the *toga virilis*. But his possession is still precarious. He has not yet, as individual or symbol, established himself, because one man cannot maintain this state alone, against an environment where the spurious image is predominant and where the unrecognizable sin, the impossible sin, has been committed: fratricide. A Gowrie cannot kill a Gowrie, but one has. The fraternity of the state cannot be destroyed by internecine conflict, but it has been. Out of the South's resistance to this impossibility, which exists, has come an integrity mixed with turpitude, the misplaced functions of the sexes, a misdirected and fragmentary homogeneity.

When this is understood, Lucas' relationship to the novel grows clear. He is the basic symbol of the Southern predicament. He never actually performs as a character; that is not to say he is not characterized. He is the hone upon which all is sharpened. He is the society, both black and white, his white grandfather the founder of the plantation. He has inherited the manness (the signs of this the handmade beaver hat, which was the grandfather's, the gold toothpick, the pistol, the old frock coat) while his white cousin, the present owner, has inherited through the distaff side. Each is misplaced; each is confined by the isolation of this displacement, and will remain so, so long as Lucas says, "I aint got no friends. I pays my way."

But there is hope. The boy's uncle tells him, "Don't stop." Don't stop trying to rectify injustice or to restore the true order. It is still possible to regenerate Southern homogeneity, because of and not in spite of the sheriff, the old one-armed Gowrie, the hunter, the jailkeeper, Miss Habersham, and himself. The uncle says, "The white and the black in the South should confederate: swap him the rest of the economic and political and cultural privileges which are his right, for the reversion of his capacity to wait and endure and survive. Then we would prevail. . ." For at this time the man will dominate again, justice be restored, and all ordered according to place and function, even to the exact degree of place and function. Then will the blood be purified of its foreign bodies.

There is one other point to make: the boy's active identity with the basic symbol. At the opening of the book on a hunting trip to the plantation he falls into a creek of icy water, in November, goes under three times and comes up to confront Lucas: the first encounter. The shock of the experience and the sight of Lucas immediately afterwards (he appears almost miraculously) who does not help him, who even orders the boy's colored playmate to remove the pole, the only assistance offered, (the crutch of matter) so that the boy can get out by his own effort, is a kind of baptism from which he will be forevermore changed. Even the time of year marks it, the dead season which always precedes regeneration. The boy's recognition of his involvement, in spite of his efforts to free himself, even to the temptation of flight, sends him to Lucas' cell and commits him to the central adventure of the book. Lucas' attitude toward him at the creek and in the cell emphasizes the underlying symbolism of his presence. He asks nothing of anybody, not even the boy. He is intractable, even indifferent to the inherent threat in his situation. He merely directs the boy to go dig up the grave. Even in this he is impersonal and without specific information of what he will find; so that the burden of the action is shifted to the boy as his, not Lucas', responsibility, as baptism in the Church puts the burden of salvation upon the communicant.

This extends the point of view still further, saying in effect that in the action of the boy, or such as he and Miss Habersham, will the South's crucifixion be prevented; since it is such as they who can or will restore the true image by removing from within the initial injustice which has obscured it, at which time the threat of crucifixion, which comes out of the North, will have lost its excuse for being. This is the final enlargement of the point of view. The use of time in the action, from high noon until midnight (actually it becomes longer) is suggestive, even the three before the grave is suggestive; but quite rightly Faulkner does not belabor this. Within the needs of the action of a story the symbol to work must perform at every level as it does in this book. To do more than suggest the specific Crucifixion would weaken his narrative by introducing comparisons extraneous to his own truth and so compromise him.



The Town: *Helen's Last Stand*

FAULKNER'S POST OF observation usually lies with some individual who, out of his need for self-knowledge, even salvation from those complications of the human scene which "outrage," tells the story and, in telling it, resolves it.¹ But in the resolution there is usually a fuller knowledge which rescues the protagonist from the accidents of his own situation, or allows him to see it in a larger context of meaning, by means of which he can "endure"; or his plight in the end illuminates by its shock some disaster of epic proportions implicit in the enveloping action. Or else the point of view roves from individual to individual, each of whom discloses differing insights and revelations of the complication. But whatever, the point of view is essentially bardic, with the difference that the bard himself is crucially involved. He is not merely telling the story to entertain, or out of curiosity. His tale is told out of a compulsive need for understanding of self or

¹ *The Town* by William Faulkner.

community. The tale is usually part of the county's saga, but the versions are partial or differ. His function is to fit the true story together, to find out what actually happened from the contradictions of legend and gossip and special pleading. Technically some part of Yoknapatawpha is the enveloping action: its manners and morals, conventions and mores which locate and restrain the natural man, sustain or corrupt him. The action proper concerns those individuals who represent the opposing forces which will determine the county's changing destiny.

In *A Rose For Emily* the town speaks with an anonymous but communal voice. Chick Mallison's intrusion into the dust is an intrusion into the complexities of his cultural inheritance, out of his need to find his place. The risk he takes is his initiation into manhood with the attendant assumption of responsibility for his public and private personalities. By piecing together the fragments of the fatal story of families not his own in *Absalom Absalom!*, Quentin—almost hectically—hopes for greater knowledge about the son's part in the family life, either to save himself or give grounds for his suicide. At any rate this understanding does not save him from his peculiar situation in *The Sound and the Fury*. V. K. Ratliff in *The Hamlet* seems merely the interested observer of folly, as he travels about the county gathering and spreading its news; but there is a quality to the tone of his protest and "outrage" which is not that of the disinterested observer. What he sees informs him of his own vulnerability, a threat which any moment may involve him, too; and does, for he succumbs to the same moon-madness which the painted horses release in others; he is taken in by the salted mine Flem Snopes prepares for him and Armstid.

It is unnecessary to repeat for Faulkner readers the rise of Snopesism out of the ruins of the structure of Southern society, but it may be well to recall that, as Faulkner sees it, its hierarchical degrees and rituals were always temporal. Nowhere does he take the church-house as image or symbol. Always his symbols for order are civic: courthouse, jail, the square, the farm dwelling. Of course there is the greater symbol of the grandmother, the matrix, but she extends beyond an image. In the present book, *The Town*, Faulkner has Gavin Stevens say the various protestant denominations define themselves not so much

by puritanism as by nonconformism. This was the crucial flaw, and a serious one in a society predominantly agricultural, for the experience of the farmer before the mystery of the seasons and nature was always more complex than his theology could explain.

It may be that Faulkner feels that the church as institution is no longer effective in guiding and ordering behavior. The two preachers in his fiction who appear as true men of God are both from the country, the one who buries Granny in *The Unvanquished* and the one who is brought into town to bury Eula Varner Snopes. They never appear in church-houses, but in the open air. They are simple men of simple belief, plain men who are close to nature and suffer the hardships of the plain man's conditions. There is little distinction between them and the one-bale farmers (although Faulkner oversimplifies here: one bale as the norm of the hill country), except that they have had the "call." They are learned neither in theology nor dogma, but they know that evil is in the heart, and not in the object, where their more learned brothers would put it. Like saints, their connection with God is direct, and their hardships would compare favorably with those of saints. Their compassion for the human predicament lies in their power to suffer and withstand it. So Faulkner is conscious of the part religion plays; he merely does not elevate it to the dignity of his more temporal institutional images.

These institutional images, which are the cultural symbols of not only Southern but American society, operate in Faulkner's fiction as the controlling images for the larger and implied action, the true action which underlies the surface tensions and conflicts. Faulkner's neglect of the Christian Church as comm-union must be deliberate in an artist who has consistently relied upon the symbolism of archetypical behavior as the source of his enveloping action. The multiplication of our protestant denominations impairs that unity in belief and faith which maintains the equilibrium in a healthy society; tends to make the divisions, both geographical and cultural, partial and sectional instead of parts which represent and contain the whole, contain it by means of the very diversity and uniqueness of their functional and organic differences. The American Union has been merely political and so eccentric. The true communion of sovereignty under God, which medieval society at least in principle recog-

nized in the delegated powers to king and bishop, God's temporal and spiritual surrogates, with castle and cathedral as concrete symbols of this sovereignty (not to mention the person of King and Bishop), has been supplanted by an abstraction which is self-contradictory: the sovereignty of the people. The very nature of sovereignty is its supremacy, which only God possesses and so only He can delegate its powers. It is why, perhaps, the aristocracy which dominated the South before the Civil War disappeared after its defeat, for, although historically an aristocracy is an extension of temporal rule, it degenerates without the formal restraint of spiritual rule.

The moment sovereignty passed from God to, not even man, but to man in the abstract, the state lost a clear image of itself. Ritualistic representation of spiritual rule being lost, the aristocracy had only its civic and private codes to discipline itself in the performance of its service to the body politic. But even in its proper civic function it could have no formal image of itself. Where the people is sovereign, an aristocracy must pretend to be what it is not to be able to rule. Its caste is too private, as the spiritual comm-union is replaced by a too private and therefore personal approach to God, which only the saint can risk. But a code has teeth in it, such as the code of honor, demanding of the holder a civic and private principle of action, but with sufficient belief to back it up by sacrifice, both of goods and life.

Its integrity in private life, reflecting a public attitude, centered about its conception of the role of woman. Faulkner has seen and dramatized this, and woman is pretty close to the center of his epical treatment. The aristocracy's intention was to preserve not so much her purity as the image of this purity, which of course when the threat becomes overt always fixes upon an individual woman. Superficially woman was put into the role of a creature above the brute nature of man, which delimited both man and woman; romantically she was raised to the "divine" and set upon a pedestal, which actually derives from our pagan inheritance; what really the aristocracy depended upon but rarely made articulate was its protection of the woman as guardian of the family blood and mores. This heightened sense of the family was one of the things which made the aristocracy function for everybody, for in a farming community the family is the basic

unit, and by family must be understood the ramifications of its "connections." It was a real comm-union, if a social and not a religious one. Further strengthened by common economic interests and the sense of being threatened from outside (the quickest way to bring people together), the aristocracy became truly representative in its rule in the antebellum South.

Then how were the Snopeses able so easily, or rather so persistently, to usurp its place? The clue is not in Flem so much as in his forebear, Ab Snopes. Ab was an outcast, which meant he had no place in the hierarchical system in the society upon the fringe of which he lived. He could only prey upon it. He was one living in the condition of the frontier after it had passed, the frontier conditions being only bearable so long as they were temporary, the beginning from which the more successful rose to an ordered life. In the chaos of war Ab found his occasion; he found it because he brought to it the unmoral pragmatism of the frontier which was able to corrupt the grandmother, since war had shattered the social order and so rendered it, like the frontier, with no recognizable standards of behavior: only cunning and strength or whatever was fittest for survival. With moral righteousness the grandmother goes into the enemy camp demanding the return of her property; she goes in the name of civil and domestic order, which already internecine war had overturned. Colonel Dick recognized equally her courage and folly in the irony with which he gave her more mules and slaves and trunks than she actually owned, which should have informed her but which she failed to recognize was now an agglomerate loot and not property. Ringo understood the possibilities of this as a weapon. It was he who was the first instrument of the grandmother's corruption; he prepared the way for Ab. When she began to use the paper beyond its specific meaning, she was guilty of falsification: that is, she lied, and a lie is nothing, no-thing, and so the devil's instrument. Even though her reasons were noble at first, the service of others, she was doomed; for one lie begets another, and the declension of lying is moral chaos. It proceeded from the general interest to a selfish interest, her family, and the judgment upon her was death. Her fate is tragic, having both the moral flaw and the force of circumstance. It might be said that her fall was due to insufficient theology. She prays, but we doubt

the sincerity and efficacy of her prayers, for she never confronted her acts, only gave lip service to them and that literally, making the boys wash out their mouths with soap, and this usually for the violation of a propriety, which allowed her to ignore the true nature of her sin. This has to do with the grandmother as action. As enveloping action she represents the matrix, the core of the doomed South. It was her part as symbol and person to be protected by the Colonel Sartorises. That she herself must enter the conflict describes the failure of manhood in general and the aristocracy in particular. Drusilla's unsexing of herself and fighting as a man makes this clearer, showing the precarious balance of society based too specifically upon a temporal order. So Ab Snopes not only betrayed the grandmother as person; he was the agent of a larger fall.

When Flem enters the scene in *The Hamlet*, Snopesism had already preceded him in Will Varner. We are told *The Hamlet* is the first in a trilogy of which *The Town* is the second part, the last of which is to be called *The Mansion*, symbol of the aristocracy, which in the possession of the Snopeses can only be the final degradation. *The Hamlet* represents the farming countryside. The place is merely the focus of country life, having no identity apart from this. There is no longer any personal code to make decent or order the brutal uses of power, for by this time the aristocracy is suborned, dead, and its forms empty. It has no effective social influence. Money now rules; not money as the counter for the exchange of man's labor, but money itself, the sterile and bare sign of material force. Or rather *The Hamlet* shows the beginning of this advance toward the state where this is so, where materialism usurps the sovereignty first of God and then of the civil state. Its sign is the usury of Will Varner, that is, the pre-emption of the labor of others without responsibility toward those others.

But there is still manhood left in the hamlet, and this is defined in terms of the trade. The very fact that no quarter is asked or given in a trade defines the nature of this manhood. Any advantage taken is merely seeming, for the ethics of trading presumes that each man knows what he is doing; knows his own advantage and how to outwit his opponent. The most courageous and admirable trader is Flem Snopes, because he has only himself

and his wits to oppose the most powerful man in the community, Will Varner. The very paucity of his material possessions, the unbearable nature of the hardships out of which he has come, defines his heroism. The difference between him and the other Snopeses is there to show it. With nothing but his persistence to rise and his wits, brutal, lacking in human sympathy, even for himself as a human being since his devotion to his aims makes him impotent, he is able to defeat Will Varner. With only the ethics of trading as a measure of man's intercourse with man (the state has been reduced to this) Will's defeat is the defeat of his manhood. It is why his hatred for Flem is so long and lasting. The loss has a double edge. It is not only the old Frenchman Bend place. Flem uses the daughter of Will's flesh to bring about his triumph and the older man's defeat. Already we are shown how inadequate is the ethics of trading to deal with the human predicament. It takes no account of man's relations to woman. And the woman, in Will Varner's wife, steps forward to put him at a disadvantage with Flem. She forces her husband to find a husband for his daughter and a father for his grandchild, a bastard, as yet unborn. Give it a name and a home, although a home degraded and without love, for the father at least will be spurious. Will's selfish devotion to his manhood undoes him, but degraded though it be, the family as an institution is preserved. Officially the child is not a bastard, as officially Eula's fornication is made respectable.

In *The Town* we discover how frail is this respectability before the complexities of love and order in society, the two being closely connected, for this very order depends upon love. Carnal love is no longer defined or restrained by the love of God. It is sex and instinct. To such a wilderness have we traveled, and the town is its sign. Unlike the hamlet which is a part of the country, the town is set apart. It represents the county less and preys upon it more. Its symbol is the bank, a necessary but abstract usury; and unlike the personal usury of Will Varner and Flem Snopes in *The Hamlet*, moral blame is less easy to see, and the punishment less easy to understand. There are still decent people and people of responsibility and good will and kindness, but they are less effective, because the forms and rituals which should sustain them are gone. The civil functions, severed from

their spiritual counterparts, keep some kind of order, but the order has no larger meaning, and therefore it is implicit by 1927 that even this order (the police) will decline.

The decline is on its way when we enter upon the action of *The Town*'s story, for the town as enveloping action is Snopesism. It is his understanding of this which emasculates, not actually but psychically, Gavin Stevens, for he is immersed in the very thing he would like to overcome. The action has to do with man's attitude towards and responsibility for woman, which of necessity involves love. Eula Varner, the heroine, is a Helen, a Semiramis; that is, she is the archetype of all man can hope for in woman; not only hope for but be willing to fight for; and to possess should willingly surrender his sovereignty. In *The Hamlet* she is waiting for her rape, inert in the fragrancy of her flesh, in a kind of primordial aura of woman. The image is the rocking chair, forward and back, the motion of love, and the only motion she is capable of, for she is presented in a suspension of all other motion. Her destiny is McCarran, a man of courage and fighting capacity but lacking in moral responsibility for her as wife and mother. He fornicated with her and abandoned her and her child to the—as it turns out—respectability of the town. In *The Hamlet* she is the abducted virgin. In *The Town* she is wife and mother. In the enveloping action womankind appears in triad, Linda as virgin, Eula as wife, and Maggie, Gavin Steven's twin sister, as mother; but they appear in all the isolation of the qualities of these archetypes, none of them, unless it is Maggie, uniting the three possibilities in her own person. Manhood also appears in triad: Flem, Gavin, and de Spain. None of these possesses total sovereignty. Each in his relation to Eula represents one quality rather than the wholeness of man which woman demands of her partner. Flem, the legal husband, is impotent physically; de Spain, the lover as physical husband, has none of the legal or moral rights to her. Gavin Stevens assumes the moral rights (but limited to keeping her respectable) which turn out to be ineffective because he has neither the legal right nor physical capacity to maintain his feeling of moral responsibility. The three rights, separate, not the three in one, describe the fearful impairment of man's competency towards womankind. Legality becomes meaningless; love is lust; and morality a kind of sentimentality, for it is

merely a moral sense, not morality which always operates in terms of the formal rites and sacraments of social order, based on a total and responsible possession.

The forms in the town as society have degenerated into respectability. Respectability does not represent reality, only appearance. It is maintained by keeping the proprieties, but since moral action has been rendered unclear and personal because of the impaired sovereignty, they are negative and variable. It is Maggie, the female twin, who risks her respectability by introducing Eula to Jefferson society; not Gavin, who wants it. It is not the same risk as the grandmother took, for she loses her life, while all Maggie can lose is her position. (Gavin and de Spain act like boys before the ball, which is to say they are not fully responsible men.) This is a parody, perhaps, on the Dioscuri, fighting men both, with the masculine aggression and risk given over to the feminine side and the male fighting by indirection, without any risk to himself much, such as giving the poetry of Donne to a teen-ager; not to save Linda but merely to make her dissatisfied with her condition. This leads Gavin in the end to denying whatever moral stand he has, for he lies to her, to keep the appearance of truth, swearing Flem is her father.

But it is Flem in the end who is the most masculine of the lot. He takes the measure of respectability. He never confuses it with the reality, which is money. He knows it for appearance, a means to be guarded but manipulated for the protection of the reality. So Faulkner with the surprise of true poetic insight makes Flem the protagonist of the *The Town*. He can scarcely be called a hero, but he represents one in the terms in which society now governs itself. An impotent man shows himself to be the most masculine. This is real irony. He is almost a sympathetic figure, because of the high price he has had to pay for his kind of manhood. If this is identified with money, he does not disguise it, or try to palliate its sterility as respectability does. He manipulates respectability for his greater freedom. So long as it is maintained, he can practice usury or anything else. The one sin which must never be committed is to be found out. He can be president of a bank and a cuckold, so long as de Spain and Eula are not caught. He can be the father of another's bastard, so long as the moral Gavin will lie to Linda about it. He can destroy the members of

his family, so long as it is done in the name of virtue and probity.

The family is disappearing. Ratliff has difficulty in keeping the degree of kin in his mind, and the real reason shows itself at the end, not only for the family's plight but for the state's as well. The men of God fear not God but respectability. When Eula commits suicide out of boredom, boredom we presume from the failure of men to fulfill her demands, the four preachers of the town come in a body and offer to bury her, not in life to instruct her in the ways of virtue, but to bury her. They condone her action by refusing to recognize the adultery, so long as she keeps the appearance of virtue; so long as she and de Spain are not caught; the irony being that the preachers are willing to consign to hallowed ground both an adulteress and a suicide, facts known to them and the community, because her death begs for them the real question of mortal sin. To such a condition has the spiritual and temporal state been brought. Even Gavin sees this won't do and proposes to preach the funeral himself, until his sister says, "Do you want Linda to have to say afterward that another bachelor had to bury her?"

The three men appear at the funeral not in their true relationships but in the appearance of respectability: de Spain's armband can be merely the official mourning of the bank; Gavin appears as the official friend of the family; Flem was the grieving husband, who was no husband and had no love. But the final image to concentrate the meaning is the monument raised presumably in Eula's memory but actually to entrench Flem in his new position of respectability. Upon the shaft, embedded in marble, is the face of a woman carved by the Italian artist. In spite of the photographs and care of Gavin it is not a likeness of Eula, but in marble and not in flesh the image of the woman all men desire. This is the final irony, the costly appearance of love reduced to the uses of respectability. The very words underneath the face are a lie:

A Virtuous Wife is a Crown to Her Husband
Her Children Rise and Call Her Blessed

The lie, the no-thing, Satan's instrument, is death and it stands for all the town to see. To this has the archetype of Helen, the

central issue of the great war between Europe and Asia, been reduced. Troy is indeed fallen.

This is the argument, the logical decline of the previous losses. The rendition is not entirely successful. The point of view roves between Gavin, Chick, and Ratliff, but the technical advantage is slight because little is gained by the roving. Each voice has the same tone, and with the exception of Gavin, the tone is reportorial. The passion of involvement, the passionate need for knowledge and salvation which suffused the rhetoric of the earlier books is absent. The old words such as "outrage" appear occasionally, but they are as ineffective as Gavin's moralism. It seems to me that there is an error of strategy here, of attempting to make comedy out of an epical subject. The narrators seem particularly flat, for we remember them in their earlier roles. They stand behind our reading like Banquo's ghost. Faulkner should have learned from Balzac that you can't do this. Even the sheriff, Hampton, seems remote and disinterested. The only one who can view it all as comedy is the old Negress, Het. She has come upon such hard times that she is out of the action and can view it as she does with delight. "Gentlemen, hush," she said. "Aint we had a day." And she is involved in the one episode which is comic, the burning of Mrs. Hait's house by a mule. This episode comments on the action but not with the same authority that the painted horses do in *The Hamlet*. The tone of that book is dominated by Ratliff, and the outrage he feels is of a quality to allow for a kind of sardonic comedy. Not so in this book. The episode of Byron Snopes's children is a little out of tone. It introduces the exaggeration of myth with which we are familiar, but respectability can have little to do with myth. The problem was a hard one, how to take an epical subject at the moment when the actors can only play pathetic parts, only show their action as a travesty of what they should be and feel. But it is a book that shows the master's hand, even though the bard is no longer crucially involved; he is telling a tale to entertain.



Caroline Gordon and the Historic Image

ONE CANNOT HELP thinking that there is too much open discussion of the mysteries which veil the Muse and too little private performance. Even in the Grove where all was ritual, where those admitted to the service were chosen with care, even there the pretender slipped in. I take it that the pretender is he who by brutal exposure would get at the secret which, for the sake of our humanity, must remain hidden; must, because the direct gaze sees too discretely, ignoring the representative quality in the object, the mystery of creation in the bare act. If the journeyman artist is diverted and stops making to talk at large, who can distinguish the true tongue in Babel? Witness the serious acceptance in the last decades of the social science fiction for the real thing. Like all sinners it looks entirely to the object, society or some part of it, as the cause of the human predicament, and so does violence to any given man's historic position, to what he has in common with other men which can only be rendered through

what in him is unique. To assume that society is external to man obscures the actors' humanity and the contingencies which surround and modify action, and so beclouds that clarity of vision without which literary truth may not be plain to the eye. The inner chamber is always dark, because what lies in that darkness are the shreds of raw matter and the dry ligaments of the beast. This is the secret which the initiate approaches ever obliquely, never toward but around, disguising and guarding it by assuming the qualities of the Muse's triple nature: meditation through memory, into song (for fiction, rendition). And all done with the averted eye but the sure gesture.

The hypothesis of a common mystery and discipline has great value for the artist, especially today, since the secularization of the arts has increased the hazards, making performance depend more and more upon a private discipline and a private vision. But the hazard is lessened for those who understand the practice of the averted eye and the sure gesture. The averted eye allows for an image which focuses the imagination and sustains and controls its vision; the sure gesture predicates the mastery of the tools of the trade, or the necessity for this mastery, and a formal method. Formality depends upon objectivity, which requires the novelist to post himself, whereby sight (of the world, according to his scale of observation) and insight (into himself, through imagination) relate and equate what is seen and so bring the double vision into focus. The end in view is to force the meaning of experience to show beneath appearance, according to the degree of intensity the novelist-as-artist is able to maintain. What results is his ability to deliver up out of any given situation what the tension between the discrete world and the controlling image precipitates. And this more explicitly is a fusion of complexities, or levels of interest, with an emphasis on a particular level which connects all the other levels (in terms always of the controlling image). This emphasis illuminates the point at which sight and insight meet. It becomes the measure of the degree of intensity. It is the center of the circle of incantation. Off center, the writer may include or leave out too much and so distort his vision. If successful the writer will find that he has made Goldilocks' choice of a gruel neither too hot nor too cold, but just right. This involves not a recovery of innocence but its quality out of the contamination of

experience. This is the strain of creative discipline. Like any strain it has its limits, is exhausting, and must be continuously repeated. Without it vision blurs, since once the state of innocence is lost we are given over to the flux of the world. Furthermore, in a long piece of work fatigue is progressive, which demands the maintenance of a nice balance between the artist's will and his given physical, moral, and intellectual energy. In the light of these observations it can be seen how great is the risk of judgment required for the writer to post himself. The decision is close to the mystery of an art, for in the end the creative act cannot be explained.

Caroline Gordon, I believe, controls her performance by some such principle of the writer's devotion. If she did not sign her name, it would at first be hard to know her sex. This is a way of pointing out the strictness of her objectivity, and I suppose it to be the last refinement of it. A story of hers, "The Brilliant Leaves," is an example of what I have been saying more generally. It is a story, as is said, that comes off. It may not be her best story, but it is one almost made for demonstration. To begin with, the title is more relevant to the subject than most. It appears merely descriptive; indeed static and as far removed from love and violence as it could be: that is, until we examine it. The quality of brilliant leaves may summon a variety of impressions, according to their numerous associations; but the composite effect has only one representative quality. The leaves stand for autumn, the waning year, that particular moment when nature is at its most intense, and that is the moment before death.

As we begin to read, the title is not likely to mean too much. I doubt that we receive more than a vague sense of intensity, perhaps of color. Our pleasure comes later with the understanding of what the author has done. We have been forewarned, but in such a way that neither the action nor the ending is anticipated. The first three words note the time of day as three o'clock in the afternoon, that last moment when the sun's intensity may be felt. After that hour it turns swiftly downwards, toward darkness. It is the time of day most analogous to the fall of the year. Shifting now from time to setting, we find in the white houses of the summer resort the boy's aunt and mother gossiping about the past, they themselves being at the season of

life comparable to autumn. Notice the advance, the triple reinforcement: the fall of the year, the decline of day, the composure before age and death. The setting is not, therefore, simply pictorial. Along with the title, the time, and the human prologue, it contains the larger meaning of the action. Very quickly this becomes specific. Any gossip is out of the memory of action and passion, but it is particularly pertinent to the story about to unfold. The women on the porch mention the death of youth's high hopes, telling of a spirited girl whose lover fails her, in consequence of which she becomes dead to the world. We do not know it yet, but this young woman is the aunt of the girl who is about to suffer a similar fate. Notice how thickly the strokes of emphasis are laid on, the repetition by analogy but disguised by means of the familiar and casual so that we have a preparation in depth, which as it prepares, guides what is to take place.

At this point the advance narrows still further. The youth, impatiently listening to his aunt and mother, as he waits to set out and meet his girl at their trysting place in the woods, recalls that his aunt has said, "The entrance to the woods is positively spectacular." This must seem to him, in contrast to his romantic longing and to the associations of young love which the place holds for him, the dull and meaningless speech of all elders. But the speech, in the light of what happens, becomes the riddle of an oracular prophecy, technically bearing the surprise of a delayed effect, which exposes the dramatic quality of the natural setting, at once containing and informing the action. The aunt's ignorance of the meaning of her words defines more sharply her part: sibyls never comment; their office makes them the mouthpiece of the mystery and by means of incantation allows them to report without personal entanglements the consequences of fatality. The aunt's time of life has similarly removed her from the involvements of life and passion. The parallel is here suggestively close enough to make the author's intention clear. Beneath the aunt's surface view of the empty pageantry of autumn lies the root connection between spectacular and spectre. The wood, therefore, is more than the empty expanse of nature. This is mere appearance. It has an entrance, and this entrance opens upon a spectral world.

• The boy, like all actors caught in the toils of fate, is blinded by

his anticipation of what will be denied him. He cannot see behind the familiar marks of nature the mysterious workings of the supernatural, although he feels the change the instant he kisses the girl. Her lips are cold, not warm and clinging as when they parted in June. The intense moment of illusion, which is young love, is dead, but the boy will not accept it. The girl knows it for what it is but hesitates to tell him; refers to the change of the seasons as the thing that is different without understanding the implication of the seasonal change; and so by her evasion innocently commits herself to her death. The symbols of their plight continue. They move through the dead leaves, kicking them up but without any sense of warning. They stand on the rock overlooking the valley. A black car moves swiftly, in a straight line, and disappears into the secret woods below. It is the distance of vision which transposes the car as matter to the car as symbol; but they do not notice. The girl's aunt is mentioned very casually as a woman disappointed in love. There is no awareness that the girl is already repeating her aunt's history. Her behavior is like one devoted to and done with the world, to be seen through her treatment of the boy, a shift from love to comradeship, the meaning of which is denied her. He is the puzzled follower, the earthbound, the one most suited by nature to mediocrity, the moment of love's illusion now vanished, so that she sees his true dullness.

At this point a less skillful workman, with sufficient signposts established, might proceed to the catastrophe. But the author has paused. There is something lacking without which the catastrophe would have no more meaning than any of the violent accidents which clutter life; and that something is crucial: a belief in the love affair. It is already over when the action begins. Up to this point the reader has had to take the affair on faith, and to fulfill the author's intention more is needed. The problem then becomes the necessity of presenting a dead love as alive. A flashback or interior monologue would violate both the structure and point of view: and yet the love affair must be witnessed. The author is now under the kind of pressure which, accepted, makes for the best kind of writing. Her solution is to continue the seasonal pattern. With the surprise of true invention she takes the lovers down into a cove that has delayed its seasonal advance.

The entrance here is choked with dead leaves; they go down a Confederate road, the road of dead hopes, descending into a place that is green like summer, remote, private, made for love. We are allowed for the moment to forget that it is illusory; it recalls the couple to their early love and by means of the love scene which takes place, although it comes to nothing (the girl brings them back to comradeship before it advances too far) we have seen enough to believe in what has been. The complication of setting is elaborate. Sexual symbols now join seasonal ones: the moss, the fern, the little pines which grow around the pools. But the air of the place is cool and not from autumn chill but with the coolness of a deeper shade: that is, the general symbols of autumn and death now receive a greater and more specific intensity. The illusory quality of the cove leaves the sense of a shadowy place, so that the scene as witnessed might be the ghost of what has been and of what will be. It is as if the girl's spirit has already entered the timeless condition toward which she will soon plunge. The texture is so varied but so singular in its variety and concentration toward one thing that it develops the intensity of a truth which only literary truth can give.

Against this setting which is no mere occasional background the characters are presented in their fatal entanglement. It is not a story of the death of young love in general (that is: what all the young have in common and beneath which their personalities are for a short while submerged). Both the boy and girl have character and the very character which makes the catastrophe believable. The girl, like her aunt before her, demands the intensity of devotion, the complete denial of self, of love's pure flame. But each has the flaw of choosing men who do not come up to their responsibility either as men or lovers. The aunt, descending the ladder to meet her lover below, while her father holds a shot-gun through an adjoining window, descends only to see her lover disappearing through the bushes. She enters the front door and dies to the world. The niece falls to her actual death because her young man's character does not conform to her romantic image of what a lover should be, but more particularly because he refuses the responsibility of his manhood in forbidding her to indulge a dangerous whim.

The complexity of the situation is kept complex. There are no

sharp antitheses but a fusion of the forces involved, so that the action becomes on all levels a fated action. It is fated that young love in its pure illusory state cannot last. The temperaments of the lovers are not suited to any affective union. The short intense moment of youth is all they have in common; but while she realizes this, he is attracted by the quality in her which causes her to dismiss him. The sense of his loss, without the recognition of why it is, the love scene in the cove which gives him hope and for which neither is responsible, leads him to acquiesce in the girl's risking a dangerous action (to her, romantic) which he knows he is no longer equal to, but which represents his desperate effort to recover the lost relationship between them. Their characters are set against the fated circumstances. When the boy runs for help, he is running as well from his own fate, not seeing the dead leaves at his feet but looking toward the white houses of the summer resort—another kind of death, but representing to him the secure stable world. He is ill-fitted to the tragic mould. The shock of what has happened is too much for him (he expects the houses any moment to slide off the mountainside) so that he is now as lost as the girl. The girl's death is a kind of triumph, his confused terror only pathetic. Each makes its comment on the ways of the world.

The story of young lovers, one of whom jumps or falls from a high place, is a legend of all mountain resorts and is continuously being told by people with a gift for story-telling. They make it interesting, but the interest is accidental and sensational. What it lacks is meaning. No doubt the aunt who has called the entrance to the woods spectacular will speak of the death as tragic, which it has been Miss Gordon's intention to show it is not. She supplies the meaning through the carefully balanced tensions in the structure and composition, forcing from her language connotation as well as denotation, but restricting both to the representation of what her imagination sees in this particular incident; so that what is unique in it, though never obscured, relates and refers to an experience so common that the total fusion of the parts delivers up for meaning an ironic attitude toward all experience.

To go so fully into one story, and that not her best, may seem disproportionate to the larger issue of her novels; but it will serve,

I hope, as an introduction to her method of attack. It will be my assumption that writers of Miss Gordon's vision have but one subject. On one level hers is in the fullest sense traditional and historic. By this I do not mean what is commonly understood as the "historic novel": that is, the costume piece or the arbitrary use of certain historic periods dramatized through crucial events. The costume piece can be dismissed as offering a special kind of entertainment; dramatized history is often, not always, too eclectic, suffering from a structural split between the scene and the action, obscuring the poverty of the performance and the actors' inhumanity by its pretensions to historic truth. Historic personages, when they appear, appear not as men or women but in a quasi-mythical clothing. It would be a great feat to subdue the Lincoln myth and present him as a man acting within the limitations of his private needs and their public expression. The "history" gives a false authority to the action and a spurious illusion which in retrospect seems forced and arbitrary. The same objection brought against the sociological novel repeats itself here: you cannot say what is history and what is fiction, so that inevitably you get bad history and bad fiction.

The legitimate illusion, on the other hand, once established, will always give the sense of contemporaneity, of happening before the reader's eye. To manage this successfully the author must first absorb the period of his scene so thoroughly that the accidental restraints of manners and customs become the medium of representation of what is constant in human behavior. The tension between form and subject then becomes right in its strain. But the sense of watching the action as it is taking place, although the primary test, is not enough. There must be for the definition under consideration also some historic image of the whole, which will serve as a center of reference and the selective cast to the author's vision. Mr. Kantor's *Long Remember* failed, in spite of its splendid rendition of the battle of Gettysburg, for the lack of an image equal to his subject. In spite of Lubbock's well-reasoned contention that *War and Peace* is two books and that the incidents surrounding Natasha begin as the representation of eternal youth only to change into her private destiny, Tolstoy does have a unifying force, and this force is his central image: an image not to be found in his historic argument but at the very

core of the dramatic plight resulting from the revolutionary decision to Europeanize Russia. In terms of this his title has meaning, and so do the waste and confusion of Pierre and the cynicism of Prince Andrew. Prince Andrew's father Kutúzov, and even the Czar clarify themselves more completely when examined in the light of such a referent.

It has always seemed to me unsatisfactory to explain *Madame Bovary* as naturalistic and *Salammbô* as romantic. Flaubert's craftsmanship is equally good in both books and of the same quality. The dimensions of his art and of his imagination are better described by means of a vision which is controlled by a historic concept of society. In *Bovary* it is a special view of bourgeois France; in *Salammbô* it is the fertility rite of Tanit. Naturally cultures of such diversity could not be represented in the media of each other's textures; nor does it follow because of this diversity that an extreme dichotomy exists in his imagination. Felicité and the old count with the napkin about his neck and drooling his food, in the context of the story and the scene of the book, are clues to Flaubert's critical objectivity toward the bourgeois world which suggests a historical understanding more inclusive than this world.

This historic image of the whole allows for a critical awareness of a long range of vision, by equating the given period to the past and future, sometimes explicitly, always implicitly. This makes the period at once the setting and the choral comment. Such a restriction upon the imagination adds another range of objectivity to the post of observation, another level of intensity to the action (as if the actors while performing expose to the contemporary witness, the reader, the essential meaning of their time). This is literary irony at a high level. It is the nearest substitute for the religious image. In a time of eclecticism, such as ours, while it will not directly solve the writer's simplest technical problem, it gives him balance and lessens the risk of a faulty vision in that it keeps the scale of observation from being entirely private, or of seeming so.

It has allowed Miss Gordon in *Green Centuries* to relegate the usual American interpretation of the frontier to its proper place as evidence of a social phenomenon of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—not an easy thing to do, for, spurious as

it is, its pretense as the most common inheritance in the American tradition obstructs at every angle the clear view. As a myth it stands for a vague but persistent belief in a mystical vitality which will overcome nature, whether it be the wilderness, a business opportunity, or through science the very secret of life itself. The vagary of it, I believe, undid Wolfe as an artist just as his pursuit of it made for the wide cult of his readers. His own true vitality and talent, wasting for the lack of critical apprehension or of a historic sense, seemed the regenerating fountain to his spiritually thirsty contemporaries. But in *Green Centuries* the frontier becomes the complex fusion of two attitudes toward the vast expanse of the wilderness in the middle of the eighteenth century: that of the late Stone Age Indian and the European. As I shall try to show, it becomes much more.

These attitudes are never treated didactically but disclose the cultural tempers of the two societies, with the understanding that the source of this temper lies in man's view of himself against nature. And in the background there is enough of English colonial policy to keep the perspective just. The Indian settlements had barely disturbed the endless wastes of forest and plain. A religious people, their behavior was governed by fear of and identity with the power of nature. The supernatural existed as an extension of nature. They took from the wilderness only according to their needs. In their positive identity with the natural world families traced their descent from the beast, the fish, or even the wind. The preservation and continuance of life, therefore, became the center of their religious practice, the dignity of man and the rites of hospitality its corollaries. Their warfare did not evince a destructive instinct. It was a religious rite, and therefore a social rite, which submerged the end of fighting which is death beneath the ritual practice of it. The great warrior was he who most skillfully practiced the arts of war, endurance, cunning, the ritual of the warpath. Surprise was the great tactical feat. Fighting to the death was rare. To bring home hair and not lose your own was the measure of the fighter's reputation. To the European the virtues of the Indian, matrilineal in descent, seemed feminine. Their muscles were round and the texture of their skin was soft like a woman's.

The purity of this feminine culture had already become

corrupt by the eighteenth century. By means of the traditionalist faction in the Cherokee nation Miss Gordon was able to use the resulting self-consciousness to bring them alive, as she could not have done if she had had to deal with the Indians in contact only with each other, in the isolation of their own world. In opposition to this society the European presents a masculine principle. He makes a destructive war on nature, and therefore upon himself, setting out to reduce it without measure to his will. He does not want to live at peace with the Indians (the land was large enough for all, as the Indians pointed out). He wants to destroy him as one of the many obstacles to his own restless drive. It was he who used the peace treaties as breathing spells. The Indian's word meant what it said; it was an expression of his integrity, of himself as a whole man, since his behavior at any moment, under any condition, whether it was hunting, or fighting, making peace, or love, all come from a coherent view of himself in relation to nature. The European, now at the tail-end of the Renaissance, suddenly released from the restraint of Christian feudal forms which in Europe were able to disguise the revolutionary change in attitude, was able now for the first time to find his antagonist in the absolute state of wild nature. The axe and gunpowder were instruments as later the technological process and practical science were instruments, but man's obsession that he could force nature to deliver up all its secrets and its goods has never been more clearly seen than in this westward advance.

Each long hunter, each frontiersman became a primitive, homespun Dr. Faustus. Having dismissed the Devil along with God (the Protestant belief in a private communion with God is equivalent to Man-become-God), man no longer had any defense against his violation of the laws of nature, nor any absolute set of principles to which he might refer the processes of reason. His plight is more terrifying than that of the protagonists of Greek drama, whose fated action achieved the dignity of suffering the inscrutable will of the gods. The unbalance of a purely masculine society, sharpened by the appearance of the Indian feminine society and therefore no true opponent to the European (he never doubted his ultimate ascendancy, and because of this the Indian's opposition drove him to callous acts more brutal than the "savages" could possibly perform), itself a violation of nature's

law of reproduction, becomes the complication determining the action of *Green Centuries*.

It is useless to inquire whether the author's original interest lay in wondering what really happened on the frontier or whether she began with a historic concept. To know what was happening to men and women as men and women in a frontier society it was necessary to represent the action in its fullest context. While acting out their private lives they must perforce present a more public destiny. And the more private in character her actors the truer the vision.

When she uses historical figures, such as Daniel Boone, it is always as they might appear to their contemporaries, men in some way heightened but always men. Boone is not he who "killed a bar." He is the person in young Outlaw's eyes who is exciting because he has been there and has seen actually what the long hunters all see before their eyes—"three, four hundred buffalo grazing in one place, and deer and elk mixed with them—High land and open all around, open and covered with white clover. There had never been anything like it, never would be." It is this dazzling vision, the purely masculine vision of the hunter, of man alone with himself in an elemental trial with nature (that temptation of all the most near to a return to chaos, chaos being disguised by the purity of the vision, the longed-for land replete in richness, both in ground and game; perhaps the hidden nostalgic effort to return to Eden or some state of innocence) which kept the individual of heroic proportions intact but initiated the wandering restlessness that denied ever the occupation of such a land, the irony being that it was everywhere about, sight of it obscured by the brilliancy of the delusion which all suffered.

Any report would cause the hunter to abandon the rough cabin, the cleared space around it, and remove. Daniel Boone thought it time whenever he had to fell a tree whose branches would not drop near the house. This was not so with womankind. Biologically, and not only because of children, her need was to settle somewhere. The hunter's need for women always brings him back, retards him; but he also drags her into danger beyond her strength and will. This stress at one level is the subject, involving the deadening of the sensibility of womankind, reduc-

ing her to natural or even to sub-animal responses. The moment when this is reached tells the climax to *The Captive* and *Green Centuries*.

The effect on the reader is an almost unbearable irony, not tragedy, because the impact of the wilderness is greater than man can bear. We no longer believe in demi-gods or in heroes become gods. Rion, the sign of the great hunter, has a personal meaning for Rion Outlaw, not a symbolic meaning for the reader. Nor does Cathy come from the garden of Eden, but out of a settled and late stage of European civilization, with inherited needs which are denied her in the wilderness. More or less is demanded of her than she can respond to. For a finer shade of the irony we turn to the basic stress between the sexes, clearer in the wilderness than in an ordered society, since there are no institutional restraints to mitigate the biological sexual strain. In the end there is little dignity, no purgation of pity or fear, in Cathy's state or in that of her husband, whose restlessness will never cease nor ever come to rest in the perfect spot of ground. By means of his humanity man is punished for the pride and vanity of his dream. His human needs he can never discard. His punishment in the aimless wandering is a Sisyphean agony, but the victim becomes the woman. Man also becomes the equivalent of Cain, for Rion Outlaw is indirectly responsible for his younger brother's death. Skillfully and very indirectly Miss Gordon has prepared by his softer temperament for young Archy's adoption into the Indian tribe, which is an affront to his older brother in terms of the masculine obsession. Her use of the two brothers sharpens the focus which the feminine culture of the Indians would not alone have allowed.

It must be emphasized that there can be no absolute sense of contemporaneity in the presentation of any age, or segment of an age, anterior to the time in which the author writes. Indeed, if this were so, the principal value of using historic material would be lost: the value being just this illusion of the contemporary within a context of historic perspective, so that while an act takes place it is rendered in terms larger than those of its immediate appearance. This is, I believe, the furthest extension, and it is just that, of the aesthetic distance taken by writers concerned primarily with the formal, objective view. It is not equivalent to

the mask of Greek tragedy but allows for dramatic effects of equal intensity, assuming the difference in the audience. The *Torch Bearers*, for example, could assume a knowledge of the myth at every degree of perception in the audience, out of a cultural unity expressed through an active religious belief. Neither Miss Gordon nor any other writer of fiction can count on this kind of reception. She must assume contemplation and some measure of critical apprehension on the part of the reader; these are her limits and her freedom. The reader, in turn, cannot ask of her absolute historic truth (if such there be) but that her myth of which the image is the concrete surface will be coherent within its own terms. With the exception of *Green Centuries* she narrows her scene to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as that fragment of time more nearly comprising the clearest opposition of forces which is her general reference and dramatic impetus, the moment of equilibrium before the shattering of a social pattern, when the very air is charged.

Penhally, her first novel, covers the entire period. It is the progress, in a closely related set of miniatures, of the disintegration of a family, coincident with the disruption of a culture whose virtues are stable and traditional. The forces which triumph show in their triumph their monstrosity. The family is not entirely at the mercy of these forces from the outside: the complication moves from within as well as in the persons of two brothers, one the protagonist, the other the antagonist, and this process repeats itself over the generations.

The matter of the division of family property in *Penhally* becomes the internal sign of disorder, and the action seems to imply that the younger brother who wants his share of land and a house of his own in part sets in motion the Nemesis of destruction from the outside through the revolution of the Civil War. In her other books she deals in larger canvases and in more detail. Although she uses the same family and its connections over and over, the same situations often, the same characters, yet in her repetition there is always variation. Although her vision shifts and enlarges its perspective, the shift is never withdrawal from her circle of incantation, but around it. In *Penhally* the older brother, Nicholas, representing the traditional stability of family, based upon landed property kept intact for succeeding generations

through entailment, becomes the symbol of the restraints of the mores upon behavior. The identity of the family with the land is more than physical identity. It is first of all the proper fulfillment of pioneering as against the perpetual, aimless motion of the early frontier. It reaches back in an effort to regenerate the older Christian sense of order. Its use of nature is also the care of nature in terms of one locality, one farm, which has a name, as Penhally, or Mayfield. The name of the farm and the name of the family becomes indistinguishable. They have a character which is a metaphysical crossing of certain blood lines with the influence of natural environment. In terms of the plot the conflict sharply develops between the characters as personality and the characters in their blood relationships. This presents itself as the outward level, the texture almost of the historic center. Alice Blair and her male counterpart who courts Lucy belong to branches of the connection who marry the property. This would seem to the uninitiate the true expression of the pattern; but actually it violates it in two ways: it views property for personal use instead of as a trusteeship, and it violates the integrity of the person as person. Lucy's bitter complaint was that she wanted to be loved for herself (when she is no longer an heiress her fiancé does not pursue his courtship), whereas Alice Blair chose Charles as the most likely match, when her instincts drew her toward John. The cataclysm of war turned the tables on her calculations: Charles was killed, and when John renewed his offer of marriage, old Nicholas opposed the marriage of his heir with Alice, not on personal grounds but on the knowledge of her blood. She withdrew without a defense, admitting her position and making it plain to all. The irony is that if she had been true to her instincts of love she could have, with honor, also gratified the traits of her branch of the family. The irony within the irony is that Nicholas could force the issue at a time when the defeat of the traditional pattern made his position, for future generations, meaningless.

But the irony is not simple. The central meaning of the book is its complexity, striking like an alternating current, back and forth among the characters, the situation, the historic changes. Lucy in the end married John, which in happier times would have given their union meaning as the medium of the family's self-perpetuation; but since the defeat of the South, the marriage leaves them

not even a personal fulfillment. When her son is caught sleeping with a young cousin in the house itself, the blow to Lucy is two-fold. She is affronted by a girl who has been loved for herself alone, under great risk, which circumstance was denied to her, and also suffers the shame of her son's behavior—a violation of the house's integrity, if not its prostitution, which makes him an outcast and later sustains the wisdom of tradition in terms of its disappearance: the boy's wife cuckolds him and he shoots himself. The last act of the drama concerns his two sons who return to Penhally, but a Penhally that no longer has meaning in terms of the society as a whole. The younger son inherits the love of the land but cannot make it pay, since the land is now merely an area of industrial exploitation. To "love" the land is itself evidence of the change, a self-consciousness which is a sign of loss, and certainly an over-simplified view which never would have occurred to old Nicholas. As a further emphasis of what has happened, the position of the brothers is reversed. At the end it is the eldest who commits the final act of prostitution, first of himself and then of Penhally. Nemesis no longer pursues; it overtakes both when the younger, driven to exasperation, shoots his brother. This act, both desperate and futile, for it can only be an act of protest, in its highly personal nature, the antithesis to the traditional concept and function of order, is the last comment, the final twist of the irony.

None Shall Look Back fills out by a more discursive method the fortunes of the family in the midst of a war which destroys the social basis of its way of life. *The Garden of Adonis* has for scene the country community about the time of the last depression, when the full effects of defeat have had time to show their marks. *Aleck Maury, Sportsman* is not outside her subject but treats it in a very special way; and her most recent novel, *The Women on the Porch*, shifts the location to the city, the full-blown symbol of the western progression, or more specifically in American mythology, the end of pioneering. The heroine, the first to marry outside the connection (and this is significant), in her flight from the City with no intention of returning to the family seat instinctively finds her way back, but this time to a place of ghosts and sybils. But the startling disclosure of the book is the crystallization of what has been gradually emerging, the theme of

prevailing interest. To isolate such a theme, as I shall now try to do, is an act of violence and distortion to the work as a whole. Briefly, this theme is what Life, the sly deceiver, does to womankind but particularly to the woman of great passion and sensibility. It is not that men do not come in for their share of sorrows and disappointments; it is, rather, that Life, represented in the only possible hierarchy of institutional and organized society, has a masculine determination. Very subtly the White Goddess reasserts herself as Miss Gordon's Muse. The young girl in "The Brilliant Leaves," the various heroines of *Penhally* (Alice Blair the dark sister), Lucy of *None Shall Look Back*, and most eloquently the wife of Aleck Maury, are all the same woman. Very few of the male characters—Forrest, Nicholas, Mister Ben the possible exceptions—are able to measure up to the requirements of what the heroine thinks a man should be.

In *None Shall Look Back*, the only one of her books where tragedy appears over her prevailing tone of irony, this theme finds its closest identity with the structure and subject, which is death. Death as a part of the experience of living is to be found here, certainly, but is of no more value than any of the phenomena used to create the illusion of a world. Death is also used in the formal way of the great tragedies, as the fulfillment, which is also the release, the judgment and the meaning of the tensions of drama. And since the setting of the book is war, death becomes the Adversary. But Death as a feminine force appears with the surprise of all the freshness of invention, and the moment of greatest passion, the very passion of despair and bitterness, is the moment when Lucy recognizes her loss of Rives in the preknowledge of his death. The quality of this recognition lies not in just the loss of him but the loss of him to a rival of greater charm, whom she has long come to know by the gradual supplanting of her image in Rives' thoughts by that of the Dark Lady so constantly with him. The heroine has a rival at last equal to the demands of her pride. With this in mind Rives' taking of his wife upon the battlefield becomes an affront. The transposal of the relationship defines their tragic situation. On his part it is the act of despair of the man who, rebuffed by his true love, takes another as substitute. Her despair is the knowledge of this, and it gives her the highest intensity of any of Miss Gordon's women,

the most successful rendition within the dramatic context, and her only woman of tragic proportions. At first reading she seems a cold woman, but it is the coldness of an Electra, of an excess of passion and pride before her stupendous rival.

As the envelope for this, with reference to the historic image, she marries Rives, a cousin who stems from an eccentric branch of the family. The eccentric is the subversive element in a tradition, because his freedom is self-willed. Freedom in an ordered state is the freedom of the will and depends upon responsibility defined by place and degree. Self-identity is always realized out of the fiction among the complex relationships of a well-determined whole. The self-will of the eccentric destroys this identity. Ideologically the abolitionist is such a person. The eccentric ancestor of Rives gave up raising tobacco to go off to the gullied country of North Georgia (a proper Allard says "I would hate to live in a country where my grave was already dug for me.") to raise mulberries for silk-worms. The family may seem to recover from such an internal betrayal, which in effect it turns out to be through Lucy's plight; but the defection persists and spreads. Lucy's mother-in-law, always concerned with other people's business to the neglect of her own, is the symbol of this, as socially she is the counterpart to the Abolitionist.

The historic and personal destinies of the characters, in the context of subject and structure, at their different levels, are one and the same. The climactic moment is reached when Forrest looks down upon the dead Rives, at the moment when troops break around him for the first time, and realizes that death has been by his side all along, a knowledge the lesser men have known in their calculated risks. Like a charmer ignored, she has lavished upon him her favors; and one has only to consider her true nature to understand his heroic dimensions, his ignorance of death being not only fearlessness but the self-immolation of those few who by utter devotion to anything—the Church, war, love, an art—have already undergone the denial which makes them fit company for so awful a companion.

Those few of Miss Gordon's male figures who achieve the stature of greatness do so in terms of a near equality to the feminine principle as personified by the heroine; but it is such an equality as Adonis suffered before the triumph of the masculine

principle in heaven. The social pattern and the constraint of its form is a derivative of a man's world; therefore at the moment of its dissolution, the woman is set adrift, as in *The Garden of Adonis*. The girl's father cannot, because of his situation, be properly responsible for her welfare (the same holds true of Ote toward his girl). Mister Ben's effort of salvation can only be a personal effort and for this reason miscarries. His delight in his farm is a withdrawal from the chaos around him, as well as a refusal to face his actual plight. His daughter's adultery shatters his position and releases the tensions of a complicated involvement which brings his death, a judgment upon the inadequacy of personal salvation, at the same time that it comments upon the rapid advance since the Civil War of the disintegration of the social order.

In many ways *The Garden of Adonis* promised to be her best book. There is a loosening in the treatment of character and situation, a heightening of her people as persons, a sensuous clarity heretofore more restrained. Certainly Ote Mortimer and Mister Ben, as well as many of her minor figures, remain in the imagination, well-rounded and complete and as men superior to their circumstances. They will remain after the details of the action which defined them grow vague. But the girl has no personality; she is a shadow from the beginning and so is her lover. Structurally the book is a failure. It is almost as if the freedom which the author allowed herself in the texture extended itself carelessly when she came to the structure. After getting one set of complications under way and the interest aroused in a set of characters, she stops and introduces an entirely different set in the center of the book, and this in great circumstantiality, so that you get the sense of two novels progressing side by side, some of the characters of each accidentally crossing over to make for disaster. For her central development all she needed, perhaps, was the impression of the industrial society, or its symbol personified in some way, to precipitate the catastrophe; or else make a much longer book. She has done this in *The Women on the Porch* through Mrs. Manigault; she has done it almost in the description of her hair. Mrs. Manigault is a woman of indeterminate age. At first glance one cannot tell whether the hair is actually gray or by the skills which money can command is cleverly platinumed. And

if platinumed is it merely some exclusive fashion of beauty, or does it subtly deny the passage of time, as the green blanket of mortician's grass thrown over the red mound beside the grave disguises for the moment the gaping hole?

This ambiguity represents the death-in-life, the triumph which is defeat, of that pride of man's assumption of the godhead. Miss Gordon's strategy was right in choosing the woman, and not the man, as the descriptive image, for always it is the woman who represents the life force and man only its direction. Mrs. Manigault's energy is the sterile energy of a restlessness comparable to the restlessness of Orion Outlaw. In her case it would be an aimless motion, but for the tell-tale heart. She represents the woman, the latest ideal of the masculine image gone to seed. She returns to the country, to a place where things are still things and people people, where communion is personal; there she learns of her plight, but it is too late to do more than set about the destruction of her son. There is a true hatred between them: it is the only thing that gives her life. The older masculine dominance had more humanity and humility. In its defeat its womankind could still commit adultery and have that adultery carry meaning; but there is nothing that Mrs. Manigault can do that has any real meaning. But to return to *The Garden of Adonis*: perhaps the actual technical flaw at the center is the use of Jim Carter. The dramatic plausibility of so discursive a rendition of modern society would be its corruption of Carter, but it is never clear that there ever was anything to corrupt, that he ever had more than a high degree of sexual charm and a callous insensitivity. Certainly there could have been a more economical way of showing this, a subordinate and occasional extension of the girl's complication. The relations between them intended more.

Although it was probably not the author's intention, *Aleck Maury* undertook in an indirect way, at least in the representation of the personal solution, what *The Garden of Adonis* treated more explicitly. For the personal solution growing out of a social disintegration of values Aleck Maury is a rounding out of Mister Ben. The conflict here is not between a man who would develop his faculties to the full against the demands of society; it is rather of a man against time. Outside his special delight he moves through the world with as few commitments as a titled foreigner

would allow himself in visiting a friendly country. Behind his pursuit of the arts of the field and stream lies the ruin of the hierarchical values which he might have expected to sustain him. In this society hunting and fishing would have taken their proper place; but because of the ruin, and in his terms this meant a loss of identity since he had lost location, he instinctively turned to the one knowledge and love more nearly a substitute. But the pursuit of his pleasure becomes obsessive, so that in the end it becomes not pursuit but flight, and the hot breath of the Furies can almost be felt lapping the air he has just vacated. He is a more humane Rion Outlaw, the masculine image now desperate in its effort toward personal salvation. Like Outlaw he cannot isolate himself entirely within the hunter's arts. He cannot deny the need for woman, nor escape entirely the consequences of union. One of the most eloquent pieces of understatement in literature is the death of his wife. The very manner of her dying is judgment upon him, an eloquent and secret triumph over his feckless manhood. As fine a book as it is, one feels the limitations of the memoirs form.

The historic image which is so integral to Miss Gordon's work is not static. Behind it is a myth, and the process of rendition I hope by now will be seen as dynamic in the sense that the image enlarges as the development of the complication grows. And what comes through from novel to novel is this sense of growth which distinguishes what is permanent and what there is of change, but always in terms of the human predicament. In *The Women on the Porch* the world city is the latest and final symbol, the apparent triumph of the masculine impulse toward the godhead. But the reality, as the story implies, illuminates the ambiguity of this triumph, which has put into man's hands an instrument only a god can control while it has kept him a man. The knowledge of his predicament renders him impotent, the woman sterile, which indeed to a god must seem a very trifling disability at the most, something to delegate out of respect to the understanding of lesser intelligences. But to the natural man, pretender to all knowledge, this comes to be a bitter miscarriage of his hopes, the final mark of defeat. Chapman's apostrophe to the City is the recognition, the bowing of the head, before the

darkened husk which has led the way into the long narrow corridor of no return.

"And the queen? O City, preparing for what strange, nuptial flight! Having stung her sisters to death, she rises on rapid wing, but when the dead bridegroom has dropped from between her feathery legs she will hurtle down, past the heaped bodies of dead and dying drones. Will not the odor of decay penetrate the royal chamber, interrupting even the processes of fecundation, so that, seeking a cleaner air, she may lead her hive forth in a last flight, in which, travelling high above orchards and the gardens, they will not stop to cull honey from the apple blossom or the rose, but will continue on, an insensate mass, until, dying, falling in a great cloud, they darken with their wings the whole west?"

Besides having the quality and tension of the best poetry, this apostrophe is the essence of compression of the image in terms of the subject and the subject in terms of the image, and the final release of her meaning, where the style and dramatic quality make perfect complements. The very discreteness of the city's materialism gives it an insubstantial quality, the lack of location of a state of mind. Appetites and even being, disembodied, move about in a Purgatorial air. The figures generate a kind of effluvium, which is at once their sin and its punishment. The illusion of this, emanating out of the tone and tension of the style, follows the girl in her flight from the city. The women on the porch who receive her are also ghosts, but there is more substance, more privacy; they are haunting the world of matter. One has the feeling that Mrs. Manigault, in spite of her restlessness, has never had enough substance to haunt anything. She is that queen bee spreading her feathery legs for the bridal flight, and soon she will take her incestuous way, with her son drawn after her in a grim caricature of the young god Adonis, because for him there will be no resurrection.

The heroine's sense of this, in her adultery, makes her realize that her affair with the boy can come to nothing, as she understands that the women on the porch can never restore her to any true location. This knowledge, after a dramatic revelation of it through the electrocution of the stallion, reconciles her with her husband and they decide to remove. I am not quite clear

about their relationship. Is it that they come together out of the knowledge that they are both victims of forces too great to encompass? If this is the shock of realization which makes plain the vitality of their love, and Chapman's effort to strangle her when she tells him of her infidelity would seem to establish his love, then she has failed to do what she did in "The Brilliant Leaves": make us believe in it. We may assume that her flight was out of the injury of his betrayal; but it could as easily have been out of injured vanity, for her heroines have great pride and a knowledge of man's incapacity. At any rate the vision here is a little clouded; one feels for the first time a dichotomy between the historic image and the subject. But this flaw seems a crack in her structure which the perfection of the prose will not allow to widen.

This examination into her work must be understood in its partial nature. To expose as I have done a certain part of it for analysis is the violence of all inquiry and merely an introduction for a more comprehensive study. I know of no writer of fiction that other writers can study with greater profit. Her tension at times seems too severe, as if her image as mask penetrates the passion and, instead of objectifying, freezes it. It causes her characters at times to appear immobile or cold; and the constant friction between mask and passion, or between form and subject, loses then its balance, and a kind of stasis results. But certainly she is one of the few distinguished writers of fiction, in the shorter pieces as well as the novels—and I do not limit this judgment to the immediate past—and it is a comfort to realize that her art gives evidence of its vitality and growth.



Note on A Traditional Sensibility

A GENTLEMAN TO whom so many are beholden has now reached his sixtieth year; twice the years, if we can believe another poet, it takes to drain the cup of folly, the moment in time when a man may pause to consider his worth, to judge and be judged. And yet not a time to be done with time. As so often in the past John Ransom makes the occasion for his friends to observe the amenities. This in itself bears upon his worth. In the midst of confusion, rude hurry, when the very shards of society are pounding together, his birthday allows us to be civilized. The custom of praising one who has distinguished his profession reminds us that birthdays have meaning beyond the accident of birth; for the occasion predicates values, and values suppose forms and institutions; else there is that vast dissonance, the chaos of the accidental.

Of the men I have come to value, whether as teacher or friend, 'he has seemed the easiest to communicate with, the most natural

in his ways; and yet one could not go further afield than to approach him by way of the natural man. The ease of communication depends upon something to communicate; the naturalness upon a great reserve. The presence of any superior mind in any given time or place is perhaps more than accident. It is best to accept the fact of the mind; then move as quickly as possible toward the qualities which make it unique. It is very hard to pin down the extent of his influence, because so much of it lies in the personal interchanges between him and a continuous stream of students. But it seems to me that one fact is of great importance; his relationships depend upon a sensibility that functions always in the same way. Any difference is a difference of degree, not of kind. I should like to explore this a little by way of an inheritance and a training.

His family from an early settlement flourished in two Middle Tennessee counties, where he was born and brought up. I think that this circumstance at this particular time, 1888 and the two decades following, is a matter of importance. Tennessee was a part of the Old West. It had been laid waste by Civil War; but because its tradition was old enough to have roots and because it was a general farming country—particularly stock farming which requires greater humanity than specialized planting—and again because Tennessee was a border state and returned quickly to the Union, it missed the extreme waste of Reconstruction and was able to resume fairly quickly a pattern of life.

But it was a chastened society. The people had believed so absolutely in the support of a just God for a just cause that when this cause went down to defeat, it became plain to all that they had sinned. Out of this grew a great questioning of the heart and a genuine humility before the fact of defeat. Religious debates were held all over the countryside, and they were heavily attended. If the subjects were unimaginative points of doctrine, the dialectics was learned. Spellbinders were about but not overwhelmingly so. At the same time, along with this turning to God, there was a sentimentality which, feeling pressure from the outside, perverted and weakened the formal patterns of conduct. Vaguely felt was the shadow of coming events.

I have a point and I will make it briefly. John Ransom reached manhood under the training of such a society. Because of his

father's calling he must have been especially aware of the strength and weakness of the Protestant discipline. His secular education was at this time in Tennessee in the best tradition of humane learning. Certainly his training derived from a coherent view of life. It was the last possible moment to get so completely this particular kind of education, for this was a historic moment everywhere in the Western world, the latter part of the nineteenth and the first part of the twentieth centuries. It was the last moment of equilibrium, of peace and the enjoyment of the peaceful arts. It was the last time a man could know who he was. Or where he was from. It was the last time a man, without having to think, could say what was right and what was wrong. For almost overnight, with the automobile for symbol of the change, the community disappeared.

Although the historical shift was sudden, the stages of the revolution would proceed more slowly in the case of the individual; and especially was this so in the case of John Ransom. Because of what he was, he would be slow to accept the validity of the change. His was particularly the kind of sensibility which absorbed all that was form and style, the permanently recurring truths which a tradition hands on and guards. In a time of contradictions, where the lasting and the accidental intermingle, he might have expressed in his person the confused vision afflicting so many of this time. The critical part of his mind allowed him to distinguish the impurities, the sentimentalities, and the narrowness of a doctrine unequal to the complex, insoluble matters of experience. The dualism so eminently descriptive of his point of view allowed him to compare the richer tradition of Western civilization with the more limited strain of the particular Protestant Tennessee variety. His medium was the freemasonry of Literature; but he by no means limited himself to this, although it absorbed a large part of his imagination and interest. Instinctively his position asserted itself whenever the occasion demanded, because his mind and sensibility were so tempered. Perhaps his more intuitive performance demands greater consideration than his conscious assertions. Others have critically presented the case for traditional value. He has represented it.

It is worth noting that he was slow to recognize the great change in attitude, in habits and manners, already well under way

at the end of the First World War. It was his association with younger poets and critics, many of them his students, whose training contained the contradictions of their time, which served as the shock to his imagination and set him in the way of his mature work. The younger men more nearly represented the private sensibility before the spectacle of a breakdown in the common sensibility. His dualism contained a less ambiguous center of reference. His poetry, both in subject and form, was less private in its appeal, for he assumed a more common sympathy and understanding for the ever-recurrent contradictions of life, the disparity between form and content, between the Word and its exegesis. This provides the source of his irony, and creates, in part, the tension of his style.

During the twenties and the thirties one had to reckon with the fact of general disorder. One wonders if a situation so foreign to his instincts may not have been responsible for his neglect of the Muse in favor of criticism and philosophy. But there was no betrayal of his innate conservative view of order. And now it seems that he is coming more and more into his own, for there is everywhere a search for some kind of balance. Never do the forces of disorder reach an absolute and final triumph. Never are they contained from below, but always by those who are able to withdraw the Image from the desperate shiftings of the pragmatists, who among themselves offer the part for the whole. The need now is for the wholeness of his view, and perhaps this defines the essential qualities of his value. Although his medium may seem isolated from common affairs, the artist and thinker does not work in a common way.



Allen Tate: Upon the Occasion of His Sixtieth Birthday

IT WAS JOHN RANSOM who introduced me to Allen Tate. I was at Yale working with George Pierce Baker (where I learned what a scene was) and he wrote me there and gave me his address in New York. So I owe to John Ransom, among other things, a long and cherished friendship. It could be said that I owe him my wife, since it was Tate who some years later introduced me to her. But in this kind of sorites where does gratitude end? It neither begins nor ends, for friendship cannot afford to measure the occasions for its uses nor mark too narrowly the moments of communion. Certainly all this was in the future. Yet the future may be no more than the suspension of what is always present, awaiting the moment, the seeming accident in which it finds its substantial form. In the Old West of Tennessee and Kentucky people of like interests and station were bound to know each other, or at least know the stories of common friends whose personalities were interesting enough for gossip or tales. I'm sure

I must have played with Tate at Monteagle, and Nicholson Springs was only a few miles from Estill Springs. And who can say it was not the tone of Captain Beard's voice reciting poetry upon the verandah of the summer boarding house at Estill, pausing only long enough to call to his wife, "Maria, Maria, the hogs are in the yard," which marked the little boy with the enormous head?

At any rate the day I presented myself at the basement entrance of 27 Bank Street I was met with a severe and courteous formality—it was as if the eyes reflected but did not see what was before them. Later I came to recognize this as a mask to keep the world at a distance, because of the artist's necessity to be saved interruptions while at work; or merely to save himself boredom, which he cannot hide. I learned this necessity for withdrawal in his house, as I learned that the artist's discipline is almost its only reward. Once a caller asked for Katherine Anne Porter at this same address and was received with grave decorum and told, with a bow, "The ladies of this house are at the riot in Union Square." The bow, as well as the words, was a conscious emphasis upon the irony of his situation, the common situation of the artist living in New York, belonging to no cliques, and demanding that the profession of letters be accepted as a profession. He, more than any other writer, has upheld this professionalism of letters. This attitude is obviously more French than English and is, I feel, unique in the English-speaking world, at least to the extent he carried and carries it. Ford Madox Ford had this sense of himself as a writer, but he would have claimed not England but Europe for his habitation. Tate would see Europe for what it is historically, as it relates to our common inheritance. To hold this position has not been without its price. I have at times thought that he had advanced himself into tactically untenable positions, or used too much force upon what seemed only an outpost engagement. But in a rearguard action, after the campaign and, indeed, the cause is lost, strategy and tactics become one and the same thing; that is, "no bulge," as General Forrest called it, can be allowed to the enemy as your force retreats, lest all be swept into oblivion.

Every serious writer has one subject, I believe, which he spends his life exploring and delivering as fully as he may. Tate's subject

is simply what is left of Christendom, that western knowledge of ourselves which is our identity. He may be classed as a religious writer, and that from the very beginning. The literary historian is likely to see his work as the best expression of the crucial drama of our time. "We've cracked the hemispheres with careless hand!" Does language more poetically describe the plight of western civilization? He has many voices: verse, biography, criticism, essay, even fiction—but one language and one subject. In rereading him I was surprised to find that, even as a young man, especially a young man in the twenties, he saw the religious doubt, the failure of belief, as crucial. In the same way he accepted the South's defeat not as a private or local affair but as the last great defense in a going society of those values, particularly human, we know as Christian. Even in the earlier verse such as *Causerie* and *Last Days of Alice* the ironic complaint derives from and hangs upon this ambiguity of belief. In *I'll Take My Stand* it was his essay which argued the religious position. The diversity and range, certainly in the verse, can be seen in the manner in which he divides his collected poems into sections. Early pieces are put by the latest, but the book opens with the larger treatments of his position, the historical and cultural past, not as background but as vision immediately related to the poet and all others now living. The first section opens with *The Mediterranean* and closes with the *Ode to the Confederate Dead*. The final irony of the sound of nature's soughing of the leaves serves for a transition to the other parts of the book.

The sixtieth year is a wonderfully anonymous marking of time—not yet three score and ten; nor, alas, that station where time reverses his light heels; yet it is the last station where one may look both forward and back. Behind him lies a body of work anyone would be proud to call a life's work. And yet there is time for it to be only the great body which awaits its crown. As I myself skirmish the borders of this anniversary, I find that I am close enough to hear the secret so well kept. Ours is the immortal generation. And how do I know it? I know it with my sixtieth-looking eyes which see now, at last, that it is not we who are getting older, but the young who are getting younger, smoother-cheeked, more innocent-eyed, so that it is a marvel to find that the sounds they are making are words, perhaps language even.



The Working Novelist and the Mythmaking Process

WHEN I FIRST began thinking about the book which was to become *The Velvet Horn*,¹ I was thinking consciously: that is, rationally. I could almost say falsely, except that the creative act uses all the mind's faculties. I thought I wanted to do a long piece of fiction on a society that was dead. At the time I saw the scene as the kind of life which was the Southern version of a life that, discounting the sectional differences, had been common everywhere east of the Mississippi and east of the mountains. That life seemed to me to be what was left of the older and more civilized America, which as well retained the pattern of its European inheritance. The Civil War had destroyed that life; but memory and habit, manners and mores are slow to die.

As a boy I had witnessed its ghostly presence, and yet the

¹ *The Velvet Horn* (New York: McDowell, Obolensky Inc., 1957), is set in the Cumberland hill country in the nineteenth century, and revolves round the passionate-natured Cropleigh family.

people which this presence inhabited were substantial enough. They were alive in their entire being. They seemed all the more alive because their culture was stricken. The last active expression of this society seemed to fall somewhere between 1880 and 1910. Those decades seemed the effective turning point of the great revolution which was to diminish a Christian inheritance. The mechanics of the change are obvious to all; through its means, the family was uprooted by destroying its attachment to place. In the South, certainly, family was the one institution common to all its parts. There was great variety to the South's homogeneity, which the false myths about it never understood. There has been no part of this country so afflicted with "galvanized" myths which presumed to interpret it, but it was family as institution which best expressed its culture. By family, I mean all the complex interrelationships of blood and kin, the large "connections" which extended to the county lines and by sympathy overlapped the states.

I take the automobile as the supreme agency in the destruction of attachment to place, since the railroads did not destroy the communities; they merely connected them more readily. Family and place, as I said, go together. It was the sense of both which set the South apart in this country, but too much was asked of the family as institution. It should have been one among many institutional expressions of culture; it was called upon to do more than its form allowed. But the artist works by means of such limitations. So it seemed to me as I began. I had no intention, no sense of dealing with a myth which forever recurs within the human scene.

This conscious approach is merely one way in, or down. The writer may begin with anything, a mood, a scene, an idea, a character, a situation. Whatever sets him going generally appears suddenly in that suspension of attention which is like the aftereffect of shock. It is a condition of the psyche when it finds itself outside time. This condition may be the occasion for vision or dream. In the Middle Ages any man might know it. Dreams remain, but vision commonly fails us today. We are helpless before the condition in which dreams appear; but vision strikes the state of consciousness. This stroke and that mysterious sense of being possessed largely remain for the artist, the point being

that presumably he suffers this intrusion when he is conscious. Presumably, because the aftereffect of shock allows for a certain awareness of what is going on around outside, but the consciousness does not respond in action. It is suspended before the intuitive and instinctive action taking place within the mind. Somehow, through a fissure, the unconscious pierces the consciousness, and from below streams the image, or whatever it is, that sets the artist to work. The shock is a true shock. It paralyzes the rational mind momentarily. It is mysterious. The cause, the source, can in no way be discovered by natural or positive means. But the experience is true, and forever denies to mere formula a rendition of the knowledge which is experience.

The creative act is, then, both a rational and an intuitive performance. What comes up from below through this fissure generally relates to the subject, but for me at least it always seems at first to be the essence of the subject. It can be this, but it rarely is. It must contain the essence, however; and it is just here that the conscious use of the craft of fiction comes in. The craft is the lesser part, but nevertheless crucial. Without its procedure of arranging, finding relationships between structural parts, and all such matters, as well as the tedious search for the right word or phrase, there would be no art of language as fiction.

It is curious, but for as long as I have written, I am always surprised afresh, after much sorrow and trouble to get a story going, that the idea may merely be related to, not be, the subject. Each time I have to learn afresh that it is either a segment of a larger idea or an idea too big for the action, as it shows itself. The resistance to its dissolution in the action is enormous, partly because it retains the excitement of the moment of inspiration. This inspiration is a momentary vision of the whole. It quickly sinks into the abyss from which it arose, leaving the idea as a kind of clue, the end of the thread which leads into the labyrinth. No matter how firmly the critical sense has explored the idea's limitations, the moment the artist engages himself, he cannot but take it to mean more than it does. An idea is so inflexible; it tends so easily toward the conceptual. It *must* turn flesh before it is fiction. Fiction above all should give the illusion of life, of men and women acting out some one of the eternal involvements we

all know, resolving, not solving. Only God may solve. A character or a situation would be the simpler way to begin. It would lead more directly into the conflict. It is rarely my way.

I feel there is an advantage to beginning with an idea rather than a situation or a mood. This advantage is suggested by its very irrefrangibility. If the idea is universal, in action it becomes archetypal. Therefore, to render it describes more nearly a whole action; and the artist must not tell any story but the *one* story which the people and situation demand. I would like to distinguish at this point between an opinion about behavior and archetypal representation. Opinion is the vulgarity of taste. It is never a true idea, because it is either topical or partial. It distorts any action, since it is blind to the fullest complexity of that action. No matter how disguised, opinion always has a "message," it always wants to prove something instead of making experience show itself. Its selection of incidents, therefore, is often obviously arbitrary. This is the failure of the realistic school of fiction, if a school it is.

To begin by wanting to resuscitate a dead society, it seems to follow, involves the writer in a great risk. It gets in the way of bringing his people alive. For the first hundred pages or so he is in danger of being misled by opinion. He is saved by the creative act; that is, he is saved by his people showing life. The moment comes when the actors in the stress of the situation will come "alive," will make a response that reveals them. In the light of this response the writer can go back and rectify, revise, remove the scaffolding. Then he is able to examine, to criticize the impulse which set him going. He can do this without impairing the life evoked. He can do it because life is there. It is at this point that the conscious and the intuitive practice of the craft work most easily together. The mechanics for this is cleaning up as you go along. Ford Madox Ford taught me this method. Many practice it, but not all. You do the day's stint, let it set, and next morning look at it again. Tighten it up, change things about, and then proceed. As the action grows, each day's work moves closely out of what has gone before. In the beginning it is not always clear which of the threads of complication holds the center. Cleaning up at last shows it. This is a decisive moment. Such a process simulates natural growth most unnaturally: that is, it has about it

the mystery of all growth, and yet is artificial. The common miracle of life is the seasonal change. It is so common, and of necessity must be so, else we would be too aware of living in a state of constant miracle. This would strain the amenities. So it is in the practice of a craft. But there are moments when the craft is overborne by the stroke of life. This is the flash of miracle. This is the artist's reward, almost the only lasting reward, for it is an assurance that the work is moving as it should. Perhaps it was of this that Blake was thinking when he said the artist continues the act of God.

How gradually does this bemusement with the strict idea lift. I do not now remember at what stage it became clear again that you do not write about a society living or dead. You write about people who live within the constraint of some inherited social agreement. They are already involved when you take them up, for there is no natural man. He has never anywhere been seen, certainly not within historic time. But what is natural or common to all men has been changed from birth by manners and mores, institutions, all the conventions and laws of a given society. It is the restraint of decorum, propriety, taste, the limits of estates and classes—all such which distort, repress, guide the instincts, impulses, passions, the unruly demands of the blood toward the multifold kinds of behavior. All forms of intercourse rely upon faith and belief. This is a platitude of statement, but as working knowledge for the author it shows itself with the fresh light of truth.

And this working knowledge was already informing, changing from a concept to the movements of life, the idea of a dead society. I was not only rationally seeing fuller implications; that is, I was not only seeing of what this society was composed as action, which had already taken it out of a conceptual stage; I was comparing it to the cycles which other societies go through. The decline of civilizations, for example, of necessity follows the failure of belief, the cultural forces gradually withdrawing made manifest in the hardening of traditional laws and forms, foreshadowing rigidity: that is, death. But out of death comes life, as oppositely death is the conclusion to life. Within the circling spiral of such change lies the belief in immortality and continuance. At some point it came to me that it is the archetypes which

forever recur, are immortal, timeless; it is only the shapes in which these appear that seem to harden and die, that is, the manners and mores that are unique to a given society; and these shapes are the appearances of reality, the world's illusion moving within the illusion of time. What a shock this was to my partial and emotional view of the South!

Now the South was a mixed society, and it was a defeated society; and the defeated are self-conscious. They hold to the traditional ways, since these ways not only tell them what they are but tell them with a fresh sense of themselves. Only defeat can do this. It is this very self-consciousness which makes for the sharpened contemplation of self. It is comparable to euphoria. The sudden illumination made life fuller and keener, as it made life tragic. But it stopped action. The very heightening of self-awareness made for a sudden withdrawal of the life force. What was left of it remained in the surface forms. The forms were shattered, but because of this force they held their shape briefly. The shed skin for a while shines with life, but the force of life is already on its night sea journey. I did not know how to define this force at the time; I only felt it vaguely, as I felt the vacuum beneath, which is the atmosphere of chaos. I was slow to connect this basic energy with the repetitive thrust out of chaos into the surrounding void, but I felt I knew that chaos is the underlying condition of any artifice, whether it was the state or the family or a work of art. Mythically, for so far only did I read the myth, it seemed the state Adam and Eve found themselves in after Eve had been taken from Adam's side. Their expulsion from the earthly paradise seemed to put them into the disorder of chaos. Actually, they were confronted by a natural order which was a multiplicity of the conflicts of opposites. This is not chaos but life as we suffer it, and we fall into it as the child falls into the world. Continuance depended upon the exercise of the will and especially the crafts, not only to survive but to try to restore, to bring together the two halves which make a whole. Together, man and woman serve as the basic symbol for the life drama. How old is the sentence we hear every day, "This is my better half."

It was some years after I had been working on the as yet unnamed *The Velvet Horn* that I realized I was treating an aspect of this ancient drama. The brothers and sister, under the guidance

of the eldest, withdrew from the stresses of formal society in an effort to return to the prenatal equilibrium of innocence and wholeness. This is an habitual impulse, the refusal to engage in the cooperating opposites that make life. It is also as illusory as any Golden Age, and forbidden by divine and human law. Therefore, it is the grounds for one of the oldest forms of search and conflict. The symbol for this is incest. It need not be fact; but it is symbol, also one having a literal counterpart; in one instance in the story it happened as fact as well.

For many years it has seemed to me that incest was a constant upon the Southern scene. There was plenty of circumstantial evidence. The boys' and girls' rooms seemed too obviously separated. I remember in old houses the back stairs with solid paneling to hide ankles and lower legs as the girls came down. Call it prudery, but what is prudery? The fear of incest, if incest it was, was perhaps not overt, but I knew of whore houses where too many of the girls had been ravished by fathers and brothers. Even if these were extreme instances—I had no way to know how general they may have been—still they were indicative. But the actual union between close kin was not my interest. It was the incest of the spirit which seemed my subject, a spiritual condition which inhered within the family itself. I did not have to look very far, no farther than both sides of my own house, to know this. It was clearest in the county family, where the partial isolation meant an intimacy and constancy of association in work and play which induced excessive jealousy against intrusion from the outside. Often enough a partiality for one child went beyond the needs of parental care, bringing about all kinds of internal stresses within the family circle. This jealousy, this love, extended to the land and to natural objects with a possessiveness lasting even generations. I know of a family that today will engage in ritualized quarrels for hours on end over whether a field has been let grow up in sprouts, while the guests sit as at a play. These are all love quarrels, and the land is as much subject as object.

But to return: once I had got well into the first section of the novel, I had completely forgotten that I had wanted to bring a dead society to life. What part incest would play had, as well, moved to the edge of my attention. I was involved in the first pressures of making a world, peopling this world into which the

young nephew, Lucius, would be guided by his uncle. The surface action seemed to be the initiation of the boy, culminating in his first sexual experience, although this was by no means his only adventure. The world he was entering, I felt, must seem out of the world, withdrawn, mysterious, of a strange look to him and refreshing, since in climbing the Peaks of Laurel, he left behind a dry and sterile place, burning under excessive drought. Of course he was climbing into his entanglement with life, which his father's suicide would rebegin. The seeming accidental reason for the climb was to witch a well: find water. It bore a literal as well as symbolical meaning.

Gradually I became aware of the need for this double usage as far as fiction is concerned. The symbol should always have its literal or natural counterpart. It should never rely upon the Platonic ideal image; this is a concept. Since fiction is an action in which nothing must be left inert, a concept of perfection, say, cannot be known actively. Perfection can only be sought out of imperfection, out of the fallen state of man represented by the cooperating forces of good and evil. The reinterpretation of myth by such people as Jung and Zimmer has done much to make this clear, but I think it has always been known by a certain kind of artist, if only intuitively. It was the yeast which worked the dough. An image seemed, then, not an imperfect reflection of perfection, but an action derived from the shattering of a whole into parts, which in all myths of origin begins the world drama. The end of this would be a reunion of the parts into a whole, but a whole no longer innocent. But this reunion never takes place in the world, else the drama would end. Here was the clue to the end of my novel, however, although I in no way saw it. The action had not moved sufficiently to inform me.

Anyway, the action itself must be symbolic of the archetypal experience. This, I consider, was the most important thing *The Velvet Horn* taught me. The symbol must be more than an inert sign or emblem. Where symbols appear—and there will be one to contain them all in their relationships—they represent the entire action by compressing into a sharp image or succession of images the essence of meaning. For example, in animal nature, the horn stands for both the masculine and feminine parts of being, the 'two aspects of the apposites which make a whole: the two in one

contained by a single form. Add the velvet to this and you posit the state of innocence, that suspension before the act which continues the cycle of creation. At a certain moment the buck, out of the mystery of instinct, rubs the velvet off against the tree, and then he is ready for the rutting season. The velvet grows about the feminine end of the horn, and it bleeds as it is rubbed away. The blood is real, but the act symbolizes what the other end of the horn will do. In human nature the horn's counterpart would be the hermaphrodite, Hermes and Aphrodite contained within the one form. Their separation, Eve taken from Adam's side, at another level continues the cycle of creation. Both forms exist within the constancy of the seasonal turn of nature. The entire range of imagery relates to these.

So used, the image as symbol becomes the clue to reading, the means by which all the parts are related to the structure. It is not inert but active, being both root and crown of a particular living experience. This is technically called the controlling image; and once discovered, it allows the reader to read, not read *into* a book his own preconceptions and preoccupations. It also guides the judgment as it analyzes the rendition. When an action eschews the partial or topical, it is always symbolic, that is archetypal, whether the author knows it or not. To see a fiction either as so-called realism or symbolism is to commit the literal error, either as writing or reading. Realism distorts or diminishes the full action by plotting beforehand a beginning, middle, and end. How can this be done without inhibiting the creative act? How can a writer know beforehand what his people will do, until he has put them into action and so let the kind of thing they do show them for what they are; and upon this ground proceed partly creatively and partly deliberately? I rather imagine that when such fiction is successful, the author allows his creative sense to abandon the rigid plotting or the parts of it which get in the way. On the other hand you find the symbol misused as sign. Sign as symbol will be inserted in place of the concretion, the motion of action. It will be made to stand for the action instead of the actors in conflict showing it. To let the bare boards of the Cross stand for the Crucifixion is one thing; the Cross as image releasing the action of the Passion in the mind and heart is the other, the fictive way.

The writer working out of some form of myth will accept the supernatural as operating within nature. He does not take the world as the end in itself. His form will be some form of myth. Myth: symbol: archetype—the structure: the image: the conflict of the ever recurring human experience. In the Garden of Eden section of *The Velvet Horn* ("The Water Witch") there are three parts that represent the three stages of Eden as symbol of the world drama. Adam alone, the hermaphrodite, is the entire creature isolated within himself, the stasis of innocence, the loss of which is the beginning of action. When the woman is taken out of his side (symbolic: not according to nature as we know it), the separation begins the perpetual conflict. Incest is the symbol for this next stage. The third is the continuing action of the drama, the effort to fuse the parts into a wholeness which is complete knowledge. The symbol for this is the serpent, the old intruder. But there is another symbol for wholeness, the *uroboros*, the serpent eating its tail, lying about the waters of chaos. This is one of the oldest symbols, and out of it comes the only perfect figure, the circle. You will find it all over the world. In our hemisphere it encircles the Mexican calendar stone. To shift the image, Adam within his form contains the *uroboros*, both the masculine and feminine parts. Once separated, the feminine in Adam becomes Eve, the masculine the Serpent. All the goods and evils grow out of this separation, and one of the images of it is the caduceus, the two serpents entwining sickness and health. There are numerous forms of the separation, the dragon fight, where destructive nature takes its fire-breathing, scaly shape without the human creature; or the Medusa; or Moses' staff. This, I should think, is repeated endlessly in myth.

Of course reading has helped me tremendously, but I read not as a scholar but as an artist. The wonder of it is its accidental nature. I did not look to books for help. I happened to be reading certain authors at the time of writing—some even before I began, Frazer years ago, more recently Zimmer, Jung, particularly *Psychology and Alchemy*, and Neumann's *Origin and History of Consciousness*. This accidental reading comes close to mystery, but anyway the first real surge of conscious direction and awareness came out of it. The curious part is that, as I looked back over what already had been done, I found little to change.

The action was doing its own work. Whether it would have continued or not I cannot say. Of course there was rearrangement but the intrusion from the depths, where the subject lay, had already painfully and haltingly been moving in its own direction, its own autonomous way. The conscious help from me was ambiguous. I thought I was helping another kind of story; then at a certain moment I took hold consciously. The invisible form showed only streaks of substance, but I was able to *feel* the subject shaping its form. And I had my controlling image well fixed in the top part of my head: incest, the act symbolic of wholeness, not the wholeness of innocence but the strain toward a return to this state of being. Was not the brotherhood of man most supremely defined by the love of brother and sister, at least in symbolic terms? If they represented the two parts of the whole of experience, the effort to become one again must contain every kind of love which the separation had scattered throughout the world as man struggled to escape his fallen condition. Through love and the act of will he could escape it, but only temporarily as far as the flesh was concerned. The irony of the central conflict lay just here. It is most surely known in the act of love, when flesh and spirit surcharge each other, in that brief annihilation of every separate faculty, the annihilation being the act of fusion, the disembodiment within the body, which was the suspension in chaos before the fall. The moment in which this could be felt had nothing to do with time, but with its opposite, the knowing of eternity which under-stands, that is stands under or outside time, the brief insight into the unmoving Mover.

I now saw my two working parts of the structure: the moving present tense which is the world's illusion, and the eternal present tense which knows nothing of past or future but always is. We know it best in the images of dreams. But the myth and fairy tale all operate through and represent this sense of the eternal. *Once upon a time; Long, long ago in a far kingdom*—these beginnings by their tone and meaning speak of no time, no country. They are outside time; they are always and forever about what is constant in human experience. The seeming tone of the far past is the announcement of the timeless held within the point of a moment. To emphasize this, there is little or no natural landscape, no recognizable cities, in myth or fairy tale. This is a crucial

distinguishing feature between myth and fiction which deals with myth. They have the archetypes in common, but in fiction the action must be put in a recognizable place and society. The moment I say this, Kafka appears. Except for the intrusion of his moral rage, he more nearly approaches the ideal form of myth. But morality as we know it has little to do with myth.

As soon as I began to feel the right limits of the structure, I could deal with its formalities. Within the various levels and distinctions of the mind, especially where it oscillates between conscious and unconscious, I could put the sense of eternity, the images of the past which are not past but forever quivering with immediacy. Opposed to this, by closing the mind and letting the action take place as upon a stage, I could use the moving present tense, the action in time. But this last was not to proceed in a continuous movement of surface beginning, middle, and end. Each of the five sections was to be nearly complete within itself, the tensions of the action evoked by eternal knowledge acting against time's knowledge. The movement in time would allow the sections to be dramatically connected, each showing a whole but differently, involving, I hoped, the fullest possibilities of the central image: incest. Not until the end of the book would the shock of meaning connect all the parts and the action be complete. There would be no way to turn to the end of the book and find out what had happened. This puts a handicap upon reading, this juxtaposition and accumulation rather than the steady advance of a conflict, which is the way of naturalism and the oldest form of all, the simple art of narrative.

By now I also had a firm grasp upon the point of view, and I knew who the protagonist was. Everybody was the hero and heroine, but only Jack Cropleigh, the brother and uncle, could represent them, for Jack, the spiritual hermaphrodite, contained them all in his mind. He alone could suffer the entire myth. The point of view would therefore be that of the Roving Narrator, where the variety of the action might lie within the levels of his consciousness as it met the unconscious: time and eternity. Having set him apart with no life of his own, other than his entanglement with all life viewed by family and community, he was best suited to control as central intelligence, and his office as victim-savior could bring it all to a focus by his death. The irony

I intended, or recognized when it happened, lay in how little his victimage could offer. He could save nobody, not even his beloved nephew, by proxy. He could only save his nephew from running away from life. All he could tell him was that no matter how far you run you are always there. As archetype of victim-savior, Jack, I'm afraid, denies the efficacy of the Mass. His death implies that for heroes, at any rate, the sacrifice must be forever repeated, actually as well as symbolically. This perhaps is theological heresy but mythical truth, and certainly fictional truth. The feeling and knowledge he suffers throughout pass progressively through the three phases of the Garden's drama, renewing through the nephew, the inheritor, the same perpetual cycle.

The nephew Lucius, the bastard child of incest, is in a sense then the youthful counterpart of Jack, or if you like of all his uncles and mother. I think this was the reason I was so long in finding the protagonist. I had begun with Lucius so the tale opens out of his eyes and mind. Jack takes over in the next section, and the view remains with him throughout for the reasons given, in spite of the fact that it roves again to Lucius and even to Pete Legrand, the old intruder. In the roving point of view it is only necessary, I feel, for one mind to dominate throughout the story, so that no matter where the view shifts, it might seem to belong to one central intelligence, that intelligence and sensibility alone equal to the fullest knowledge. The success of this depends upon how you write it, and especially upon the transitions from section to section. (The roving is no good written in chapters.) For example, although the view is with Lucius at the beginning, Jack so fills the pages, especially toward the end, that when he takes over in the next section the reader should feel no jar and without question follow, as he was now entering a fuller complexity of the complication. If he did not feel that what had gone before was actually in Jack's mind, he could feel that it might have been. This was tricky, I know, but if it could be made to go smoothly, then what follows could also seem an extension of the central intelligence, as every mind is equal to the total experience, the difference being that only one can know the fullest meaning in suffering for all. Anyway, this is how it worked out—how successfully, it is not the author's place to say.

I can only feel that it comes off. My pace of writing is

generally very slow, with constant cleaning up and structural revisions. Too often I will spend a day on a paragraph; a page is a good day's work. But as I drew toward the end, the last thirty pages or so, the artifice completely usurped my mind. It possessed me. There is no other word for it, and I've never quite felt it before. I became merely an instrument. I wrote three or four pages a day, scarcely changing a word. It was as if I had divided myself into two persons, one watching and one doing. The physical presence seemed a shadow. I felt disgust for its demands, and appetite had lost its savor. My impulse was to remain at the typewriter and not get up until the book was done, but this would be too long for my strength. Food and sleep were necessary, and the tactical considerations of how much changed from day to day. I could not bear to be touched or noticed. My nerves had drawn into the tissue of the skin. I forced myself to eat as in a dream. I would go to bed at seven or eight o'clock and rise each morning earlier, until I was getting up at two. In a kind of half-awareness I knew that I had to watch this expense of energy, or I would give out before the end. I sensed that if I did, I would lose it, that once this possession of me by the actors was broken, it would never return. It was as if there were only so many words left, and each had its place, if I could hold out to receive them. The last day my breath was all in the front part of my mouth, and each word had weight. Then in the final hour or so they began to fade, the substance of meaning growing lighter. When it was all done, the final period made a final expulsion of breath. I leaned back in the chair. I felt that all that had gone before was right, or the illusion of the last acts being not fiction but life would not have seized me.

This is the way it was done, to the best of my recollection. There is such cunning in the way the creative part uses the conscious craft that it is hard to follow the twisted windings of the journey. It seems just that. You must act as if it is real, and yet know you are acting; but the acting is lost in the act. How it is sustained over so long a time, in this instance over nine years, is a mystery and a cause for shame, as is the setting down of what seems to be the procedure.

This fresh interest in myth derives, perhaps, from a weakening of the formal authority of the Church. Everywhere the Satanic

acceptance of matter as the only value, the only fulfillment, has been shaken. We sense again that people cannot live, except in some belief outside themselves. The cycles of cultures seem to show that when belief hardens into formalism, leaving the center dry and hollow, it is a time, as Yeats says, of the trembling of the veil of the temple. But before some new faith breaks through, there is a withdrawal into the source. This I believe to be the archetypal conflicts of myth which precede the formalized rituals and dogmas of institutional religion. This is a statement only an artist can make. And he can make it only vaguely, as it affects his work, for the artist is a cannibal of Gargantuan appetite who does not exclude himself, if he is lucky.



Foreword to A Novel, A Novella, and Four Stories

WHENEVER A WRITER talks about a story or a novel he has done, he is not speaking in his true voice. That voice has already been heard in the rendition of the action, and once done the covers of the book enclose it. It is no longer the malleable thing he worked with; it is set to its form, beyond further help or damage from him. If he persists in talking about it, instead of leaving it alone to make its effect, it is generally by way of a paraphrase or an apology. It's why we tend to skip the passages on the historians and the man of destiny in *War and Peace*. Tolstoy is not then speaking as the artist he is; he is using the voice of a Russian theorizing about a segment of Russian history. This is all the more restricted in its appeal, because Tolstoy has already put the man of destiny in the book acting out concretely his theory, and thus negating it as theory, since he has brought Napoleon alive. No abstraction can stand before Prince Andrew lying under the blue sky, thinking he is dying, and looking up to

see in the flesh his former idol. What he sees in this moment of truth annihilates the argumentative assertions of the essays.

It should be obvious that polemics is one discipline and fiction another. If you are going to preach, get into the pulpit; if you want to bring about political reforms, run for office; social reforms, behave yourself and mind your manners. The professions appear in a novel for technical purposes. A preacher may be needed to save a fictive, not an actual, soul, just as a bore may be put there to bore some other character; but the skilled writer will not bore you with a man of total recall any more than his preacher will save you your soul. Sometimes, though, the sense of damnation in a book may be grounds for spiritual review, as Dickens' *Bleak House* is said to have set about the reforms in the Courts of Chancery. Such is residual, however, not the essential intention of the writer towards his reader. When a novel obviously makes an appeal other than its proper aesthetic one, you may be sure it has been written with the left hand.

This intention of the writer towards his hypothetical reader involves many delicate and insoluble matters. Ideally the artist creates his reader as well as the book, establishing in his mind that perfect communion of sympathy and understanding which, unfortunately, remains ideal. There are no limits to hope, but there are limits to the artifice; and these are his main concern. Granted that an art is of greater truth than the accidental nature of human affairs which is its source, the artist should never forget how precarious are the grounds of attention he must ask for. The most trivial interference from the actual affairs of life is always a threat. A child falling down the stairs and screaming bloody murder will bring a mother from the very death of Hamlet. This very frailty puts an obligation upon the serious reader; he should bring to a book no preconception which will prevent him from following in all its levels the action. I am taking for granted that the story has found its formal expression. After distinguishing between the simple art of narrative and the comprehensive art of fiction, Lubbock says the critical reader becomes an artist, too. He must recreate what has been done, a greater reward always than some sensational impression of it. The pleasure of illusion is small beside the pleasure of creation, and knowledge better than simple entertainment.

The lack of a critical nomenclature commonly accepted and practiced certainly does not help reading. We hear too often the term "prose fiction," which seems to make of it a branch of rational discourse and not its true self, an art in its own right, with its own laws and conventions by means of which it enters the large field of the creative imagination common to all the arts. In academic circles, but not always and not only there, this lack of the proper critical tools fosters the habit of reducing a book or story to its theme or idea, which is to say to an abstraction. This does violence to its singular aesthetic appeal, that illusion of an action imitating men and women caught in some one of the human predicaments forever repeating themselves. The meaning in fiction should always be received actively, in the structural relationships between the parts. Reception is crucial; the reader must be moved affectively, so that his insight will comprise the fullest meaning which lies before him.

There is another approach which misses the mark. It is older than fiction, the game of discovering sources and influences, which is all very well up to a point. Too much is made of these influences, however, when they pretend to disclose the secrets of the creative act. There are only two ways to learn anything, by actual experience and imitation. If you are a writer, you partly learn by reading other writers. But the moment comes when, to quote indirectly T. S. Eliot, you steal instead of borrow; that is, you make it your own. At this moment you pass from apprenticeship to the beginning of mastery. Henry James, as we know, never listened to the end of a story. He wanted from it only what would set his own skill to working. Besides, to hear it all would have brought him up against a false sense of the history of it, false because all the facts would seem to be but could not actually be present in the report at second hand. He could not know another's mind, but he could take the risk of his own imagination. It is just this about sources and influences; the scholar can know them only in their raw condition, not how the imagination used them.

One of the influences on "Jericho, Jericho, Jericho" was *The Time of Man* by Elizabeth Maddox Roberts. I finished her book and, in the fullness of the catharsis it had given me, sat right down and in less than two minutes wrote the first page. I remember

very clearly the feeling that her rhythm had set my own to going. After writing this one page, I set it aside for four years, because I was not sure whether I was beginning a novel or a story. I might have set it aside forever, if the editors of the *Southern Review* had not asked me for a story. Or in the fullness of time I might have gone back and turned it into a novel. All kinds of accidents play their part, but in the end the writer has only one subject, and he spends his life discovering how to unfold it. And when it lies all before him, he is done for.

To put such store by influences, then, is to make a basic mistake about the nature of an art; it is to reduce it to a rational act. This attitude also falsifies the thing made by confusing what is unique to it, the artist's own way of seeing and doing, with the common grounds of experience any artist of necessity must draw upon. This common ground is the repetitive involvement with himself and his fellows which is man's affliction and his delight, the archetypal experience which forever recurs within the human scene. For example, the loss of innocence or the initiation of youth into manhood is an archetypal experience. The young Spartan who did not falter, as the fox was chewing his bowels, discloses his way of undergoing what every youth suffers at a certain time of life. But the young men of differing societies will respond in various ways. Unlike Sparta we do not formally instruct our young men. What there is of it is private and accidental. This lack of ritual limited, at the very start, the archetypal conflict in "The Mahogany Frame."¹ The boy's initiation happens "by accident," through the ritual of hunting, itself debased; and the change in him which comes at the end in a shock of illumination is the measure of how he achieves maturity without formal guidance. The way it came out was not the way I saw it when I began it. I began with the wrong enveloping action and had to lay it aside, again curiously enough for four years. When a neighbor, Sinclair Buntin, invited me to go on a duck hunt, I accepted and returned not only with duck but how to do the story. Anything, a mood, an incident, a character, an idea, can set you going; but the end must be, not any story but the one story which will deliver the meaning. The process is the

¹ The story was originally called "The Guide." Mr. Allen Tate suggested "The Mahogany Frame," which now seems to me much better.

advancing discovery, always controlled, of the hidden meaning. Michelangelo spoke of releasing the image in the stone. Material, any material, produces a kinetic change in the psyche of the artist. The subject matter is never inert, a thing merely to be observed and used. An interaction takes place between the writer and what moves him to write. Any kind of reading which ignores this is committing a kind of aesthetic crime, by taking away from the author what is rightly his.

Fiction is an action then, and an action which tells the only story which makes of the form and subject a single whole. This is the first limitation which the writer as artist confronts. So conscious was Flaubert of this wholeness that when he was asked to take away a line in *A Simple Heart* he protested that to do so would cause the structure to fall apart. The action must have a beginning, a middle, and an end; and the end is in the beginning, as the plant is organically found in the seed. An art is a craft confronting the mystery of the imagination and an even more private impulse; so the artist warily but persistently tries to discover the proper environment for its singular growth. It becomes apparent then that there is not one action, but two: the action proper, which is the conflict, and the enveloping action, sometimes miscalled background (a borrowing from painting); miscalled because background implies a static condition. Since fiction is an action, nothing should be left inert. The two actions take place simultaneously in fiction as they do in life, just as a man must be made convincing as man before he can become an individual man. Let us say that it is his masculinity which more nearly represents the enveloping action, and his unique response to a conflict the action proper. However, this is not quite adequate. The enveloping action is that universal quality, some constant, forever true aspect of experience; the action proper its concrete showing; or the action proper may be the very obverse and so show it by contradiction or contrast.

The action has two main parts: the pictorial or panoramic summary and the scene. That's all it is, reduced to its basic structural components and controlled by a point of view. Of course, such does not describe the conscious or intuitive arrangement of these two kinds of effects, or the special attention to the use of the five senses to evoke the illusion of flesh. No matter how

well you write in fiction, or what profound meaning you feel suffuses the action, unless you can imitate men and women caught in some one of the tensions we all know, you fail. And it is by means of the senses, more than anything else, that the word in fiction delivers the immediate sense of life. It is by and through them that we receive the world, know we are alive; they are the avenues, the nervous cords, which unite the physical and spiritual parts of being. They are the invisible, in a way, servile aids upon which the more crucial matters depend, and without which the archetypes would hover in the distance of ideal concepts. At this point the artist discovers a restraint as conventional as blank verse. And this is location. People do not live in a vacuum. They live somewhere. Mention of this has already been made, but too much emphasis cannot be given to the varying artificial distinctions of a culture's polity through which the archetype repeats itself. The natural man is an abstraction. He has never been seen, but what is natural to men always shows itself shaped by the manners and mores, the institutional restraints, of a given time and place. Underneath, as the impulse to action, is the degree of strength or weakness of religious vision; for without belief there would be no coherent incentive to any kind of performance, good or bad. To say this would once have been a platitude; it is no longer.

We used to have hopes, and there are occasional echoes now, of somebody writing the great American novel, as if it could be some agglomerate concretion of the American spirit. This is a naive expectation, which will become clear when it is asked, Did Tolstoy or Dostoevsky write the great Russian novel? Or even here at home, which is the great American novel, *Moby Dick* or *The Ambassadors*. They are both great and both American certainly, and yet how they differ in style and meaning, as they differ in location: New England confronted by Paris, New England confronted by the sea. From the beginning the cultural, certainly the political, stresses have in this country been local and sectional. Whatever novels we have, good or bad, will show this, no matter how disguised the sectional attitude. The very assumption that there can be a melting pot is an unrealistic belief, all the more for the pretense that it is universally American. This is not to say that the great divisions of this country do not have in common something aside from their local awareness of them-

selves; or even that the sectional differences can be so marked as in older cultures, let us say Normandy and Provence. But the diversity of difference goes beyond political attitudes; it is even found within the sections themselves; and certainly as the sections are changed by historic accident: New England before the War of 1812 and New England now. What there is in common we might call the diminished vision of the Christian inheritance. Liberty and freedom as we understand the words, and that understanding is growing vaguer and more confused, are secular interpretations of a more complete Christian polity now lost to us. The westward movement of Europeans, beginning with Columbus, not only shattered the narrow physical boundaries of Christendom but, like all extension, weakened it by reducing a union composite of spiritual and temporal parts to the predominance of material ends. With us it is called pioneering, and every part of the country was involved in it; but even in this common inheritance we find distinct local differences. The New England theocratic shift of the Mormons was unlike the Southern cattle-man's gradual advance from a semi-pastoral stage to an agrarian society. And there were those individuals, the hunters, who went alone or in small parties, following an even more ancient impulse. The general is always defined by the particular; so, even what we share together cannot escape expression in terms of local history and culture.

Of the South, and the South is a more complex term than is generally recognized, too much is made of ethnic complications as its distinguishing feature, although of course this can in no way be ignored. But it is the family which best describes the nature of this society. And by family I mean the total sense of it, the large "connections of kin" amplifying the individual unit. There are the geographic limits which allowed the family in this larger meaning (it was the community) to spread itself in a mild climate and over alluvial soils to give to the institution its predominance as not just one but *the* institution of Southern life. In New England, at least the coastal areas, there was always the sea to intervene, holding up a distant image and not the familiar, seasonal one such as land allows. Of course there was a seaboard in the South and farms in New England, but the county and township represented the difference. Both the sea and land are

feminine images, but the sea takes only men; and so the communion between husband and wife was interrupted and for long periods of time. Relate this seafaring to the theocratic oligarchies, and we discover the cultural forms acting upon man's relation to woman, which at one time made witches. What is a woman deprived but a witch, especially under the discipline of a Puritan distortion of the senses.

Man's attitude to woman is the foundation of society, under God. In the South, because of the prevailing sense of the family, the matriarch becomes the defining image. The earlier insistence on purity, an ideal not always a fact, was not chivalric romanticism but a matter of family integrity, with the very practical aim of keeping the blood lines sure and the inheritance meaningful. Before machinery was made which lessened the need for the whole family to do its part on the farm, husband, wife, children, cousins, dependents, servants all served the land and were kept by it, according to their various demands and capacities. The parts of the family made a whole by their diversity. People lived fairly close together without losing their privacy or their family distinctions. The radius of visiting and trading and marrying was generally not more than seven miles, but seven miles at a walk or even in a buggy takes time. You just didn't drop in for a chat. You spent the day at least. And the railroads did not disrupt these communities; they merely connected them. Conversation reached a high art, and it generally talked about what most interested itself, and this was the endless complications within the family and what gossip or rumor hinted at in the neighbors. Every human possibility was involved, including politics, but the blood lines were the measure of behavior. There was never any doubt about the argument between environment and heredity. Environment was what heredity inherited. At a family gathering, when people were not working but celebrating, there would always be one voice more capable than another of dominating the conversation. It was a kind of bardic voice. This opened my eyes to a technical device about the point of view, what might be called the Hovering Bard. Everybody in a country community knows something about a happening; but nobody knows it all. The bard, by hovering above the action, to see it all, collects the segments.

In the end, in the way he fits the parts together, the one story will finally get told.

This is not to say that the subject of Southern fiction is limited to what goes on within the family circle, or even that the family is always the enveloping action. But this larger sense of it must always be taken into account. It is the structure through which the cultural image, with its temporal and spiritual rituals, complicates the human drama, receives and modifies by its conventions the archetypal happenings which forever recur between birth and death. There are societies where the family as institution is subordinated to some abstract idea of the state. At one time such was Sparta, as now it is with Russia or the welfare state anywhere. But in the great days of Greek drama what would the dramatists have done without the House of Atreus? Or would we have had the fall of Troy, if Paris had merely run away with one of Citizen Menelaus' women? Or the classical idea of Fate, which both men and gods had to reckon with, how that would have been diminished if a tyranny, based on abstract economics, had held the total meaning of life? There would have been no Sophocles or Aeschylus; there might have been some kind of Euripides. There certainly would have been no Homer.

To repeat a platitude, we are caught between two conflicting world views which operate within and without our society, but most acutely in the South, because the South has been the losing cause. The prevailing Faustian view, to borrow from Spengler, has until recently seemed invincible. Relying entirely on the material ends as the only proper reward for action (the delusion that man can know the final secrets of matter), it defines itself as *laissez faire* in economics (the shift from the individual to the state does not alter this), faction in politics, social welfare in religion, relativism in history, pragmatism in philosophy. The older belief in *The City of God* as the end of the drama has persisted, if defensively, in the South. But it is the fractured view of this Christian drama, the loss of its inner meaning, which has confused Southern institutions and required of the family more meaning than it can sustain. Yet this very situation focuses the artist's approach to his material. If he tries to free himself from it, he can only do so by betrayal, which is not infrequent.



John C. Calhoun

VERY FEW MEN who have helped determine the direction of society are remembered in their true character. They too often have attached to their names some felicitous phrase or symbol descriptive of a given moment in history which is never more than a half truth at best, but is generally a distortion of everything the once sentient man represented. This is due to the myth-making instincts of the people. People will make myths, or have them made for them, suitable to the cultural images they want to hold in their minds. Of all the great names in American history Calhoun's has fared the worst. The defeat of everything he cherished by its political opposite allowed the victors (angry and vicious enough even in their triumph to order the desecration of his tomb) to misconstrue for posterity the nature of his genius. His name evokes a narrow, vindictive sectionalism. It should call forth another metaphor, the liberality of federal compromise. He was accused of doing more than any one man to bring about

disunion; yet his Union sentiments were constitutionally pure and never changed. Secession has been laid to his politics; yet his constant effort was to show how it might be avoided. Believed to be cold and ambitious, three times in his career he deliberately sacrificed his prospects for the presidency, an office he desired above all others, for a principle that was more American than Southern. Branded even during his life as a mere theorist, a "metaphysician," no mind performed with more realistic logic—not one of his contemporaries foretelling as accurately as he what conclusions might be expected from the trend of political action. Vilified as the defender of slavery, his concept of liberty was sounder than Jefferson's. Above all, though he was accused of possessing a narrow sectionalism, and though he did define in his life and action the best that was Southern, he was American to the roots of his hair. This is the man Mr. Styron has chosen for his subject, and for the first time Calhoun is presented with some critical justice.¹

The Cast Iron Man is not, however, in the strictest sense a biography. It is, rather, a critical introduction to American history; or, to be more specific, it examines, while it introduces, those causes which bear upon the failure of the American Union. Today, when political knowledge and intuition is at its lowest, there exists the greatest confusion in the popular mind over the nature of the Union. But this disorder has, with certain exceptions, always endured. The only difference has been in the degree of misunderstanding. It is the confusion between the Union, a political experiment, and the geographical union, or, as Calhoun defined it, the *land* of the Union. Indeed, this confusion was one cause for the substitution of the rule by party for government by constitutional principles. It might almost be said that the Union failed over a definition of terms. In the first quarter of the nineteenth century John Taylor of Caroline complained that the Constitution was being destroyed through a perversion of its terms. At any rate, it is now a clearly evident, if not understood, fact that the political union was destroyed in its name. The United States of America in 1937 is with its strongly national government a contradiction in terms. There has been no *United*

¹ *The Cast Iron Man: John C. Calhoun and American Democracy* by Arthur Styron.

States since 1865. There has been, as there always will be, the land which fell within the geographical confines of the various colonial sovereignties composing the American states.

There was not one of those eighteenth-century gentlemen who met in convention in 1787 to make a better Union who did not know that any polity must be measured by the degree of security and liberty it gives to the individual citizen. It is significant that there was then no talk of plans. Rule by planning and rule by principle are antithetical. The wide disparity between the political genius of those days and the present may be seen in this difference. Planning is a regulation of special masses for special and temporary purposes, leaving the delusion that the particular plans, necessarily conflicting because of their particularity, have general and permanent application. They subordinate the individual to the mass acting in relation to other masses, just as they continually change the limits in time at which the mechanistic perfectibility will be reached. The Constitutional Convention debated in terms of principles which would have universal application, acting upon each individual as an individual, be he great or small, in his social, economic, political, and religious relationships. Planning either comes from or prepares for the servile state, whereas political principles stand back of the traditional society. From principles to planning—this, with all that it implies, might be the subtitle to the conclusions one inevitably draws from Mr. Styron's thesis, for the author looks at his material to judge it. American history is no dead subject to him. The events, clash of ideas, the pure and impure ambitions of leading protagonists filling the period of his study he regards as directly antecedent to the present state of the nation.

It is this quality which gives the book much of its value. Treating, as it does, chiefly of ideas, it has the strength and weakness peculiar to its bias—strength as a philosophical commentary on political concepts and action during the first half of the nineteenth century, weakness as a biography. As a biography it is not circumstantial enough. Calhoun is still a controversial figure, and the risk of judgment which Mr. Styron so admirably assumes requires more support than he has been able to gather into the present work. It may also be objected that in a book of such length he should have limited himself more to the American scene

and restricted his comparison with European ideas and political movements. In a short study such as this, the space devoted to them is out of proportion to their actual influence upon American conditions. Nevertheless, the book is a brilliant piece of work.

Any study of Calhoun is a study in failure, for no public man has failed more thoroughly. Historians, however, should never tire of disclosing the causes behind it, for Calhoun's political defeat cannot be separated from those acts and policies which undid the Federal Union and destroyed a civilization. Every great statesman must necessarily fail. Only the politician succeeds. The very material of great statecraft precludes success. It is creative. Its ideologies propose for society ideal patterns of conduct. The stubborn imperfectibility of man foretells the failure, but without these patterns there would be no civilization. The individual's inability to realize fully the ideas in his conduct merely emphasizes the cultural retrogression their lack must bring about.

The very few great men who stumble into public life find their statecraft blocked in every direction. If they were not men of high moral tone, of a will to deny the world when necessary, and of a character enriched and made useful by this denial, they could not surmount the difficulties which work to turn them aside from their purpose. Usually they are endowed with personable qualities that attract and hold others to their service. But this does not always follow. Parnell was a cold man and a stern disciplinarian. Nobody was ever intimate with Calhoun. If he had had some of Henry Clay's warmth and magnetism, the course of American history would undoubtedly have been changed. But Calhoun would not then have been Calhoun, nor Clay, Clay, nor the Devil, the Devil.

The politician, if he is an honest man, serves his faction, at best the material interests of his constituency. If he is an opportunist, he serves himself. Unlike the great men of history he senses, if he does not understand, the irrefrangible social law that it is the inferior who survives. The noble and the great govern by principle, but, unless they can determine the rules, more often than not end by dying for it.

If there was one thing the majority of the Revolutionary leaders agreed upon, it was that this country must cut off from Europe, start anew, and somehow build a better world. Jefferson

was able to put this desire into popular language, although there was no clear understanding of what the new world had revolted against. The ex-colonists were inclined to repudiate the whole European tradition when, had they been able to distinguish more sharply, they could have seen that their sufferings had sprung from corruptions of that tradition rather than from that tradition in itself.

English pragmatic materialism with its economic expression, industrialism, and its political expression, plutocracy, threatened the American experiment at the very outset. Hamilton maneuvered with great skill to have the proposed Constitution set up finance's rule in the new world. But the Federalist party was composed of two groups with opposing interests. The great land-owners of the South and the Middle states must eventually have discovered that the rule of the rich and well born would end, if they followed Hamilton all the way, in the rule of the rich. It was this branch of the Federalist party that made any compromise possible, for their concern was a happy and workable union.

Their natural alliance was with Jefferson. Very likely what frightened gentlemen like Washington, the Lees, and the Pinckneys was the false identity of Jefferson's theories about the common man with the violent stages of the French Revolution. Jefferson meant an entirely different thing. He promised a better life to the common man, but he meant to upset the old order only to the extent of making it possible for the propertyless to get property out of the vast resources at hand. It was not Jefferson but Hamilton who threatened the kind of property Washington possessed. Jefferson was looking to a stable society, and if he meant for every man to vote, he meant for his vote to be responsible. He meant for every man to hold some property which, by giving the individual a stake in society, would produce the responsibility necessary to preserve it.

The issues would be slow in clarifying themselves, but it was soon known that the fight for leadership must rest at last between New England and the South. New England represented the more recent European tradition, the South the older humanism of Christendom with, of course, definite modifications. The South alone promised a Renascence of traditional society—the cultural inheritance of Europe modified by the fresh energies of the

wilderness. The seventeenth-century colonials had been too timid, too preoccupied with survival to tamper overmuch with the material resources around them. Their weakness confined them to the narrow seaboard strip of land. This condition preserved the conservative instincts of the traditional mind so that later, when the wilderness tempted, there would be a pattern of social life strong enough to transform its chaos into social order. The dynamics of the frontier, the inertia of formal institutions—out of this opposition came the promise of a civilization strong enough to balance a world given over to trade and business.

The more recent European tradition, which New England represented, differed sharply from the older tradition represented by the South. The New England tradition, by the doctrine of Election, denied man's spiritual equality.

This was the reverse of the Southern libertarian position. In spite of Jefferson's announcement that all men are born free and equal, even in Jefferson's time the Southern aristocracy never experimented much with such a dangerous doctrine. To their realistic minds social and intellectual equality were absurdities, but the greatest landed nabob among them would never have denied the spiritual equality between his humblest slave and himself. He might defend any number of antisocial theories with friends before his fireside, but the danger to the established order went with the smoke up the chimney. Later, in the 1830's, with the pro-slavery arguments the Southern position swung away from Jefferson in theory as well. Calhoun replied that men were not only not born free; men were not born. Children were born and, far from being free, they were born in a state of complete dependence. In the "Disquisition on Government," as elsewhere, he further argued that people must have only so much liberty as their situation, morals, and advanced intelligence entitled them to. Furthermore it was a vicious error to assume that liberty cannot be perfect without perfect equality. To make equality of condition essential to liberty would destroy both liberty and progress. When Calhoun says progress, he does not mean the increase of physical goods as the end of society.

With societies so opposite in their cultural aims, if they were to unite in perpetual union, it was seen by all that there must be an explicit bond between them. The old Confederation had failed in

war and peace, and the cause for this failure was the same in both cases. It was first a mere league between revolting colonies and later became a league between sovereign states. It carried the weakness of all such arrangements between principals who undertake a common venture: there was no final authority to decide upon action in emergencies. There was great opposition to a better union, but it became very clear that the preservation of independence depended upon a government strong enough to resist the ambitions of the European chancelleries. It was no less necessary for the states to agree on a suitable domestic policy. The nature of the former association had, therefore, to be radically changed and a government established which could command the recognition and support of the states. The difficulties were great—jealousy and fear of a change of masters.

Happily the even balance of power between the dominant sections allayed jealousy, and the difficulties were disposed of in the new Constitution. There are two things to remember in this connection. First, the Constitution introduced practically a new form of political association; second, because of its newness, there was no doubt in the minds of the leaders that the Constitution was highly experimental. The old Confederacy had been like all confederacies which the world had previously known, that is, a *union of the governments* of sovereigns; but the Federal Union was a *union of the sovereigns themselves*, the Constitution being the compact defining the terms of agreement. This difference Calhoun stressed as being of the utmost importance.

This being the novelty, it was also the danger. Would those agents who exercised the power of sovereigns usurp the actual sovereignty? The very complexity of the system, with its numerous checks and balances, emphasized the chances for failure, because those who administer affairs are all too likely to identify themselves with this power and forget their trusteeship. Here was a group of governments and departments within governments, all holding divided powers, one government with national powers without actually representing a national state, others local powers without being entirely local. There would be in each state officers of the general and local governments, some officers with general and some with local powers, to whom the individual owed obedience, but to whom the people of the state

could owe no allegiance, since it is an anomaly for the principle to owe anything but support to its agent and that only so long as the agent abides by the limitations of his agency. The general and state governments were merely different expressions of the sovereign wills, the composite people of each of the thirteen states.

It was natural that conflicting interpretations would result from such an arrangement. The conflict in the Convention was carried over into the Federal government. Hamilton and the Federalists tried to bring about by indirection what they had failed to effect directly. Jefferson answered with the Bill of Rights; and when Adams assumed sovereign powers, the Virginia and Kentucky resolutions made way for the advent of Jefferson and his Republicans to office. But just at the moment when the Constitution seemed to have the conditions for a fair trial, the struggle between Napoleon and England forced Jefferson through his foreign policy to precipitate a sectional strife.

The War of 1812 had brought to an end the colonial era. There was a return of harmony, but underneath, great changes had come about in the economy of New England which would ultimately be a greater threat to the common peace than danger from abroad. This was the shift from an agrarian-commercial economy to a commercial-manufacturing economy. But at the moment this danger seemed remote. There was a general desire to avoid the weakness which had threatened the trial of union. Calhoun had been one of the younger men in the House to support the war, and he was now one of the harmonizers of the Era of Good Feeling. He supported a modest tariff, internal improvements, and various measures which tended to strengthen the central government. His action has brought the charge that he began his career full of nationalistic purpose and ended it in the spirit of narrow sectionalism. But to believe this is to misunderstand Calhoun's entire career.

Mr. Styron makes this answer to the charge: Calhoun, he writes, was a man whose intellect was touched with genius which is always independent of time and place, his nationalism a broad Unionism which died with the War Between the States, his support of Madison's war an answer to England's arrogance and demanded by his constituency; and lastly, he did not speak for

the slave-holding interests because the make-up of his constituency was an up-country people.

This defense is not quite up to the author's later brilliant interpretation of Calhoun's action. It is true that Calhoun's constituency was not slave-holding, but it is equally true that he was connected by marriage with the seaboard aristocracy. There is a better reason for his failure to speak for slavery at this time. Slavery had not yet become a sectional controversy. The South looked upon it as a burden and even towards eventual abolition. There would be no defense of slavery until the extravagant and bitter attack had been launched by the militant abolitionists of the thirties. Then Calhoun met attack with counterattack, for he recognized the dangerous political uses to which abolitionism must inevitably be turned. Finally, to say that any genius is independent of time and place begs the question. Mr. Styron would have done better to relate the Era of Good Feeling to the decades which followed as better ground for interpreting the earlier and later phases of Calhoun's career.

The great question always in Calhoun's mind was the preservation of the Union, the peace and harmony between its sections. He was never anything at heart but a Union man, but his kind of unionism was not inconsistent with his Southern position. He did not emphasize strict construction at this time because there was occasion to fear more the weakness than the strength of the central government; and since it is the nature of democratic society to live by compromise, he was willing, for the sake of harmony, to make concessions to the new manufacturing communities in justice to their complaints over the burdens of the embargo period. Nor did he see why the western portions should not have the improvements necessary to their growth and a closer connection with the seaboard states—especially with the Southern half. In all this he saw the fulfillment of and the justification for the new experiment in government and union. He was merely supporting the general policy of the Virginia Dynasty to foster the good of the whole, so long as this did not interfere with the internal affairs of the states. It is true that under Jefferson and Madison the embargo had brought distress to New England, but if New England's ships rotted at their wharves, so did Virginia's tobacco and wheat and Carolina's rice rot on the farms. It was the

action of Europe, not Republican government, which had been responsible for this condition. But the interesting thing to consider is the reaction of the two sections. In the South the planters were willing to take a temporary loss for an ultimate triumph of principle, whereas in New England the merchants rebelled at any restriction put upon the rich profits of the carrying trade in time of war, holding the Republican government responsible for sectional oppression.

The South, when it finally looked to its sectional integrity, did so only through force; and its reluctance to think of itself in sectional terms—the North would one day complain that the South couldn't be kicked out of the Union—led finally to its undoing. It was the purpose of South Carolina, soon to become the first Southern state, to rule the Union through a South-western alliance, within the limits of the Constitution. Such an alliance would have done much to restrain the machinery of exploitation developed by Northeastern finance. That such must be the result of this alliance was so well understood and feared by the ex-leaders of the extinct Federalist party that they deliberately set about to introduce discord between the two staple-producing regions. No political strategy has ever achieved so great a success in so short a time. With the Missouri Compromise the sectional rivalry was given formal recognition. The passage of this act held for Jefferson, now an old man and not much longer for the world, the terror of a firebell at night. Old Taylor, on the brink of the grave, uttered a solemn prophecy of ruin. These Revolutionary leaders saw with doleful clarity that for the first time in American public life a political principle had been attached to a geographical line, that this must engender strife over balance of power, and that such strife must end in violence.

From this time on, the history of the country is the record of the struggle between the North and South for the support of the West. The major conflicting interests and social theories were from the beginning sectional, but the sections had no constitutional status. They could act politically only through their units, the states. This condition aided the strategy of the Northeast, whose purpose it was to disguise the sectional color of its interests, which it could well do through the nature of its defensive-offensive tactics. The South, on the other hand, actu-

ally on the defensive, was made to appear to have assumed the offensive. If the South could have acted as one political unit, the Union might possibly have been saved; but never during Calhoun's life did all the Southern states agree on any common strategy.

Apart from the tactical limitations, there is another reason, as fundamental and more important, which obstructed concerted action on the part of the Southern states. The very nature of Western aims played into the hands of Northern leaders. The only appeal to the West was an appeal to its interests, whatever they happened to be at the moment. Its earliest interests had been relief from the Indians, the acquisition of land, the right to trade in furs (which the British hindered), and assurance of an outlet to the sea. The recognition of these demands by the Virginia Dynasty continued it in power, made the War of 1812, and called forth from New England the threat of secession. But the success of the alliance destroyed it. In the Era of Good Feeling settlement of the Wilderness moved apace. With the spread of cotton culture in the Southwest and grains and stock in the Northwest the interests of this section became bound up with internal improvements, such as making waterways navigable, establishing post roads and canals, and all means of getting their money crops to the markets of the world. There was no way to sidetrack Western demands for these improvements, nor for the Indian lands.

The North, by now well identified with the financial and manufacturing groups, offered the West governmental subsidy to be raised through tariffs. This meant that the internal improvements would be paid for by a tax on the export of staples, that is, by the South and West. The West would pay a fraction of this tax, but its part would be far outweighed by the increased value to its lands. But such an arrangement could only put a severe restriction on Southern property and labor. The Old South must suffer a great hardship and its trading practices serious disarrangements. Its lands were worn; it was losing citizens and wealth to the new territories, and it was finding it impossible to replace them by immigration. The tariff to this older section seemed to spell ruin.

But the North had nothing to lose and everything to gain by

the tax. The tariff, by raising artificially the price of manufactures, would increase the wealth of the industrial leaders. The government subsidies, swelling the Western markets, would bring to Northern finance fresh territory to be drained of its wealth through finance's control of the banking and credit systems of the country. The North had put itself into the enviable strategic position by which it might transfer each year more and more of the property of the South and the succeeding "wests" into its hands. With each fresh accession of wealth would come a fresh accumulation of power, economic and political. Money attracts population, poverty makes it flee; so whereas both the North and South lost people to the West, the North was able to replace its loss by immigrants from Europe who would fill, at starvation wages and long hours, its factories and counting houses.

Some of the wealth which this policy transferred to the growing financial centers of the Northeast filtered down to the general population, but the greater part of it and always its power—witness Biddle—remained in the hands of the bankers and manufacturers. Factory laborers who were being sweated after the fashion of the English were told, when they demanded better wages, that they could expect no increase since they were competing with slave labor. This evasion was made to hand for the factory master and shows how far a decadent puritanism had spread throughout the Eastern states. Agricultural labor and industrial labor do not compete. In a free-trading world the actual competitor to American labor must have been the industrial classes of Europe; but the tariff had practically done away with any form of competition. In all justice the increased price of manufactured goods ought to have increased the pay of Northern workers, but it was labor's master, not the Negro slave, who kept labor's standard of living so low. In this way finance would increase its profits on the industry of two sets of slaves, besides taking what fees it could from the free agricultural labor, North, South, East, and West.

The South, as an alternative to governmental subsidy, could offer only the slower and less effective internal improvement by the action of each state within its own boundaries. This the West was in no position to listen to. The upper Northwest was settled by New Englanders, and although the Southwest under the

influence of the plantation economy would find its interests eventually identified with the South, at the beginning of this sectional struggle for power both Wests were too close to the frontier to value the forms of traditional society for which the South was fighting. The North appealed to a temporary interest which would finally lead to a colonial dependency of the worst sort, the South to a true but remote interest that would lead to the promise of a long-time well-being and independence—or rather, the promise of independence, because each generation must win and keep its own.

It is in these terms that the sectional struggle may best be explained, because only by subverting the Constitution and establishing a strong federal government as the final authority would the financial interests be able to carry out their antisocial purposes. I do not mean that those men who were so largely responsible for the bitter and unhappy direction given to American society always knew what they were doing, or saw in their actions more than some immediate profit or the advancement of some personal ambition. There is so much accident always in human affairs that it is folly to hope to discover the ultimate causes for social change. But there can be nothing more false than the concept that some *Manifest Destiny*, beyond the inscrutable mystery of the Godhead whose secret no worldly wisdom may probe, controls the actions of men, for such a destiny manifested in such a fashion is only an appeal to the "higher law," or a justification for an impending breach of faith.

With the passage of the tariff of abominations in 1828 the sectional struggle entered on a course from which there could be no turning back. The South took this act for what it was, the exploitation of its labor by a sectional majority, acting through the general government. In spite of the disadvantages inherent in the Southern position it showed exceptional strength in one respect—its public men. Upon their strategy would depend the independence of the staple-producing states, the unification of their various cultural strains in a unique social pattern, and the perpetuation of the Union. The general sources of the political opposition which Southern strategy had to meet is described by Mr. Styron in the division of the democracies: Popular Democracy, or the Revolution of 1828; National Democracy, or the

Revolution of 1840; and finally, Industrial Democracy, or the Revolution of 1861. It may make the meaning clearer to say that Popular Democracy is more exactly a social impulse, National Democracy its political expression, while Industrial Democracy, if there is any such thing, designates the economic control of the national state for special and private ends. These divisions serve very well as the expression of what was taking place in the different stages of contention, although there was much overlapping. They renewed under changed conditions the early question —an absolute government commanding a servile people, or a Constitutional government protecting a people's liberty.

South Carolina stepped into the leadership of the defense almost overnight. Its prestige had been great during the Era of Good Feeling, that period of calm between the first and second trials of union; but now, with the complete identity between the people and their leaders, South Carolina named the political strategy for the South and forced its reluctant sister states to acknowledge its leadership. It could not command obedience, only persuasion. But this was not the only reason for a lack of early concerted action. It lay partly in the state's divided councils. It was just here that I missed especially in Mr. Styron's book the chronological detail so necessary for an interpretation of the results of political action.

For the first and last time after Calhoun had reached political maturity he would follow, not lead his state. He was aware of the gravity of the tariff situation, but he expected it to be settled in favor of the South with the election of the ticket which Jackson and he headed. So the leaders were forced to suppress discussion, allay the excitement existing among the state's representatives in Congress, and muzzle the press. The tariff of abominations passed almost without comment in South Carolina. For three weeks there was silence.

Then "the abstract, isolated principle of liberty" was hurled down in defiance by an obscure young representative from St. Bartholomew's Parish. What the accepted leaders of the state had failed to do, Robert Barnwell Rhett and the people of the Colleton district might and did do. They addressed the governor and asked only that the voice of the people be heard. "They were not," writes Miss Laura White in her biography of Rhett,

"concerned about constitutional theories. For years the state had talked and protested. Now the time had come to act, and action must consist in open resistance to the laws of the Union. They did not desire disunion; rather they would preserve the Union by forcing the Constitution back to its original principles." More than once in later years people would recall that Rhett had said, "the day of open opposition to the pretended powers of the Constitution cannot be far off; and it is that it may not go down in blood that we now call upon you to resist." A communication to the *Mercury*, which seems to have been Rhett's, marked out his program, a program containing little constitutional argument and much appeal to action. The Union must be preserved and reformed by presenting the threat of disunion as an actual alternative; this threat to be delivered through a state ultimatum. The state should welcome support but, if it must, it would act alone. These ideas for which Rhett was to become chief advocate, secession, state ultimatum, separate state action, represent one school of Southern strategy—the separate state actionists.

At Rhett's revolt Calhoun rushed home, saw the gravity of the situation, secretly wrote the South Carolina Exposition (secretly because of the approaching election) propounding the doctrine of nullification. There was no doubt of his choice, but he determined to resist within the Union and on Constitutional terms. The state was brought under control and Rhett into the sphere of Calhoun's influence. But things did not go as Calhoun had hoped. The result of the nullification agitation is well known. Jackson came into power, and with a soldier's belief in absolute obedience violated the principles of the Constitution and laid the precedent for a strong national state. The issue came to a head in the Force Bill which Congress passed coincidentally with a reduction of the tariff: Clay's compromise.

The two authors of the events leading to this compromise came from the West. Their characters personified in the crisis the confused sympathies of their section, Jackson representing an agrarian imperialism, Clay the dependency of his section upon the economic imperialism of the East. Jackson, an honest but vain gentleman, with a passionate loyalty to his friends, most of them second-rate politicians who returned his loyalty with the intrigues of ambitious subalterns, had few generalizing qualities of

mind and so failed to deduce from the political confusion an intelligent program which would advance his section's lasting well-being. He destroyed Biddle's bank, but he never understood the full implications of its power; nor did he reason that by substituting his absolute will for constitutional government he had set a precedent for the control of the state by other absolute wills, which the North must produce in time, hydra-headed and blood brothers to the bank. Like all frontier men, Jackson valued a friend who would fight on call and discuss the reasons later. But it would then be too late for discussion, as Calhoun might have informed him. The historic quarrel between the two men was politically ominous, and nobody better than Calhoun understood why.

And yet despite this antithesis Jackson and Calhoun were closer together in their social sympathies than Clay and Calhoun. They were all three country gentlemen, but Clay was not one at heart. With the comfortable facility of all who have their being upon the surface of life he blithely set about betraying his country without actually understanding what he was doing. The very nature of his character, which was ambition, did not allow him to concern himself with any reason for his action beyond his desires. Nor did he feel it necessary to look more deeply into any matter than the immediate occasion demanded. That is why he seemed the perfect compromiser. The West not being unsympathetic to the tariff for the reasons already given, Clay readily saw the means to political preferment in the conjunction of protection and internal improvements, a strong central government, and a national bank. It is no accident that it was Clay and not Webster who formulated the American system, just as it had been Hamilton, the bastard emigré, who grasped and interpreted the extreme materialism of that element of an old society which did not make explicit the ends towards which it was moving. Corruption working from within advances so gradually that the odor of decay is more quickly sensed by the ambition of the unscrupulous or rootless foreigner, who, for his own purposes, seizes upon the weak features of any given order as a courtier upon the vices of princes.

Clay's compromises, which are supposed to have saved the Union at dangerous moments, were in no sense genuine; and they

did not save the Union. With his uncanny facility for judging the weakness of an opponent's position, he would make the conditions for a declaration of a truce, a truce to give his system another chance, for it was impossible ever for his policies to stand up to a direct trial of strength. When they finally prevailed, it was through a disguise and by indirection.

Once the issue was joined, and it was well joined in the nullification controversy, Calhoun turned his erudite mind upon a thorough study of the Constitution, examining every subsequent legislative proposal in its light. From this time on he was more and more two men: an actor trying to resolve the issues and reach a workable agreement among all parties; and the commentator, taking part in debate and strategy, but aloof, withdrawn by his wisdom from acrimonious dispute, the melancholy prophet foretelling the ruin of a civilization. In his speeches and public documents, and especially in his last work on government, there is the careful argument of a man who foresees his failure and the destruction of everything he loves and, seeing this, leaves for posterity an account of the genius peculiar to the American form of constitutional government with a complete defense of his part in the drama.

But never for one moment did Calhoun forget the end of all political action. Every compromise of principle made by his school of thought drove the South to rest its defense upon expediencies. No contemporary of his knew so clearly as he that this meant ruin. Expediency was the enemy's instrument, to be opposed only by principle, the South's one sure defense. After the rejection of the principles clarified in the nullification controversy he ordered—Calhoun's wishes were so considered—the State's Rights men to hold aloof from either party, using both to strengthen the Southern position and block hostile legislation. Finally his efforts were turned towards an attempted control of the Democratic party by the South. This party, informed by constitutional principles, would govern the country and settle the sectional quarrels which had diverted the Union's peaceful progress towards a unique fulfillment.

But his efforts were continually thwarted in this as in his other major strategy. At every crisis in public affairs the South, although it got a restatement of its principles, was forced to agree

to some action which meant an eventual sacrifice of its position. Calhoun was not for a moment deluded, but he refused to abandon his policy. This was his one great blunder, or his one great weakness, according to the way his career is construed. He could not bring himself to admit that Southern control of the Democratic party could fail. To accept this failure as inevitable left him and his colleagues but one other course of action—secession. And he would not face, until the very end, this alternative. When he remembered the happy days after the second English war, the image of a working Union was too strong in his mind, it confined too much of his life and efforts, for him to abandon it so long as there was the remotest possibility that it might be saved.

But younger men, like Rhett, did not remember the Golden Age so well. They were more familiar with sectional oppression and a progressive loss of power and prestige. Rhett had followed Calhoun's tactics with intelligence and zeal until the handwriting on the wall, he thought, had become so clear that even the blind might see it. Then he asserted his independence, the only man in South Carolina to survive such boldness, and returned to his earlier position of separate state action and, if necessary, secession. The Union was not so sweet to him as Southern independence. With a realistic, objective mind he faced the ultimate consequences of his position with a courage and will equal to the risk. "Smaller states," he said, "have before us struggled successfully for their independence and freedom against far greater odds . . . To meet death a little sooner or a little later, can be of consequence to very few of us; whilst duty performed, may remain in its consequence to many generations, and a fair name, live forever, looking to that undying reputation which has ever followed every people who have dared all to preserve their liberties." Having learned from experience that the Southern states would not cooperate, he urged the separate action of South Carolina, again for nullification and later for secession. Turning to history, he reminded the Southern people that the American Revolution was made possible by the single action of Massachusetts, throwing the tea into Boston Harbor. If South Carolina acted, either within the Union or without it, the other Southern states must perforce cooperate and follow her lead.

But the other school, the cooperationists (that is, those who believed in acting only when all might agree on method), prevailed until 1861; and Calhoun is largely responsible for the postponement of Rhett's tactics. If he had thrown his great weight and dialectical powers behind the younger man, the South might very likely have seceded in 1850 when both the physical and spiritual odds would have been in favor of a Southern Confederacy. But Calhoun, under the most favorable circumstances, would have been reluctant to countenance any action leading to a dismemberment of the Union. It could not be expected that he would be shown the way by an insubordinate lieutenant. There was no open break between the two men, and Calhoun made no effort to discipline him, evidence in itself of the widespread sympathy for Rhett's theories; but this schism in the ranks of the State's Rights school would extend far beyond suppression of Rhett's revolt. Calhoun's rule of his native state had been so strict that after his death the local leaders, obedient but always restive under his restraining hand, were in no mood to render the same homage to one of themselves. Calhoun's mantle should have fallen on Rhett; but whereas the political leaders were agreed on principles, they could never agree with one another. In addition, no small measure of this disagreement was due to jealousy of Rhett for the courage he had shown in breaking with the great man. But the difference between the separate state actionists and the cooperationists, who distorted Calhoun's doctrine, became entrenched in Southern affairs, finally doing a fatal damage. Calhoun was no doctrinaire, but it is the irony of his life that his political heirs, fascinated by his teachings, became doctrinaire in their politics and even after secession, as a party in the Confederacy, made state's rights rather than independence the end to be followed, thus subverting the entire meaning of the master's political philosophy.

How could the South remain the South and stay in the Union? Or, as Calhoun was to present the question squarely to the Senate in his last speech, how can the Union be preserved? This was his only and constant theme. In one sense, because of the terrible logic of his mind, his position may be reduced to the simplest and clearest syllogism. This is the hazard anyone runs who tries to understand, either for presentation or a private pleasure and

discipline, the complexities of his character. With the repeated failure of his practical politics he was constantly driven to a refinement of his theory, until there were times when the old charge of "metaphysician" seems justified. At the last, beyond the calling of the Nashville Convention, he was reduced to a plea of mercy for the South. To ask for justice from a hostile majority, whose workings he so thoroughly understood, showed the depth of his despair. It was admission of complete and final defeat. His fight had always been equality for the South within the Union. Secession, the alternative, meant equally the ruin of his hopes. But confronted by that spectre of defeat which all men must know, he was relieved of further decision. "The South, the poor South," he would say over like a dirge the last months of his life, "I don't know what's to become of her." Who can deny that this lament did not disclose regrets for his action at the time of Rhett's revolt and that in his anguish he did not feel the South's dark future lying heavily upon his conscience because of the refusal to face squarely the warning of his logic?

Men fail, but ideas withstand both success and defeat. Calhoun's practical politics miscarried, as have those of other men; yet his reputation is secure. It rests primarily upon a lucid statement of an idea which seems, in retrospect, the proper resolution of the difficulties of union. The particular problem of states is to prevent government from becoming the instrument either of majority or minority rule. The American Constitution, as interpreted by Calhoun, answered this problem by an emphasis upon a central feature, the concurring majority, which operated through two sets of powers, those reserved to the states, those delegated to the federal government. Powers are not delegated to a state government. In purely local affairs the sovereign acts directly. Without the concurring majority, the divided powers are meaningless. This, in its simplest terms, discloses the genius of American polity.

Where sovereigns form in union, there are certain principles on which government must be set up to resist, by its own interior structure, the tendency to abuse of power. Since power can only be resisted by power, suffrage is not enough to assure justice, for it allows only for the responsibility of the rulers to the ruled. Representation at best merely restrains the representatives. This

kind of suffrage considers the entire community as a unit with but one common interest for all sections, a manifest oversimplification. The community, therefore, will divide itself into a major and minor party, the one trying to retain power, the other to get it. Under this system those who make laws would be, in reality, merely the majority's agents, holding the minority at their mercy. Such a government Calhoun calls the government of the numerical, or absolute, majority.

It is his thesis that the Union recognizes a great diversity of interests. These interests are balanced, the one against the other, by the concurring, or constitutional, majority, a method of compromise which takes the sense of each interest through its organic majority, and *the united sense of all* as the final sense of the community. The great and broad distinction between governments, therefore, is not that of the one, the few, and the many; but of the absolute and the constitutional. Force is supplanted by compromise. The mutual negative among the various interests invests each with the power of protecting itself, placing the rights and safety of each, only where they can be placed, under its own guardianship. It is this power of arresting the action of government—be it called interposition, nullification, check or balance—which makes the Constitution.

Outside South Carolina nullification had little popularity even in its own day and has found no apologist since; yet the theory is the ultimate measure of a workable union between sovereigns. Where secession acts to dismember the union, nullification acts to make it just and strong. There is no connection between the two acts except the sovereignty of the principals. If the state may not prevent an unconstitutional action by the Federal government, it has denied its sovereignty and the union of states comes to an end in some form of absolutism.

The contemporary criticism of this doctrine was that one state might obstruct the united will of all. To this Calhoun replied that since the reserved powers are negative, they cannot usurp the active powers of delegation. If, however, a state violated the bond by attempting to include in its reservation a delegated power, the debated right might be settled forever by the amending clause. But the inertia of the reserved power was so great that, in actuality, he considered the danger to be nonexistent. Even

granting such an obstruction, it was the lesser of two evils, for the usurpation by the general government must end in some form of absolutism. There was no logical answer to Calhoun's logic.

There was, nevertheless, an answer. Eleven years after this argument had been put into final form, a ball of iron hurtled over the waters in the harbor outside Charleston. Its report rattled the panes in the city and brought the people to their feet. The hour was dawn, but it was not the beginning of a new day. It was a prophecy about to be fulfilled.



R. E. Lee

MANY YEARS MUST pass before the general history of the great war of the sixties is written, before ultimate judgment may assess the relative value of the leading performers; even before the meaning of victory and defeat can be taken. Already much work has been done on the campaigns in the east, but this present biography¹ of the Confederacy's first general will stand for a long while as the last word on his military performance. And this word has a larger implication than the narrative of other army commanders. The definitive lives of Lee and Jackson, but especially of Lee, mark the final record of Southern defense in the east. And because of the great strength of his name and his genius for victory, in the darkest hours of the last months, Lee defined Confederate resistance for the Southern nation. This consideration gives Freeman's biography special importance and justifies its length. He has spent nineteen years in gathering

¹ *R. E. Lee*, by Douglas Southall Freeman.

material and putting it together. Factually it is complete. Other material will undoubtedly be uncovered; but one cannot believe that it will question the finality of Freeman's selection. The four volumes of over two thousand pages have been beautifully and expensively presented. Illustrations are liberally inserted; and for the first time there are sufficient maps, intelligently placed, which make it easy to visualize the army's movements in campaign and battle.

Any life of Lee which proposes to be definitive must of necessity lay great and special demands upon the author's critical imagination. From the length of this narrative and the time taken in its preparation, one may safely assume that the author has set himself to his task with such a design in view. He begins by going very fully into Lee's early life, showing racial traits, social inheritances, his mother's training, the tragic end to his father's career. These sections are conventionally done; and although they assemble fresh incidents of his youth and early manhood, the incidents do not expose much additional knowledge of his character. He is a Christian gentleman with great energy and capacity, thrifty, practiced in self-denial, dependent upon family life, and suffering at times from frustration due to the slow promotion of army life. A great deal is said about his ancestry and the distinguished station occupied by his contemporary connections. This does much to place him in the mind of the reader; but, in the light of this society's destruction, it could have been more imaginatively handled. When times were stricter, as in the eighteenth century, it was not necessary for the biographer of a great soldier to explain the society from which he had sprung or his particular place in it, because the reader, being a part of that society, intuitively understood its nature, its divisions and institutions. In that time, when a political quarrel was settled by war, nothing was changed fundamentally. But with Lee it was different. He was called on to defend the society itself which produced him and the life he loved, a thing which he seems never to have understood. He conducted his campaigns largely in the eighteenth century fashion as he had seen war conducted in Mexico. This fact gives to the tragedy of his life a flavor of irony which the author has singularly missed.

But the moment the biography becomes military narrative the

tone of the writing and the interpretation become sure and skillful. The style takes a direction which only the most superior knowledge and understanding of the arts of war can give. No matter how difficult the maneuver or how confusing the tactical dispositions, there is always the greatest clarity of exposition, from the conclusions reached by the commander from the intelligence reports to the final shock of brigades on the field. Freeman understands the dramatic power of restraint, and the high quality of the prose testifies to his effective use of understatement. Throughout, he combines in the most adroit manner exciting description with the analysis of elements which have brought about the particular military conclusion, so that the reader's judgment is assisted in the most useful way. His chief and most dramatic device is what he terms the "fog of war." The method proposes to show only what was in Lee's mind at a given moment; how he reasoned in this fog and came to his conclusions. This allows for a truer judgment of his ability as a commander, and disputes in the most telling way critics who, in the knowledge of after events, have blamed him for decisions he was forced to make while laboring in the "fog." The one valid criticism to the exclusive use of this method is the limited information it gives to the reader. To get the full effect the reader needs to know the strength and dispositions of the opposing army, what was going on in Lee's army which Lee did not know, and something of those influences which led the enemy into miscalculations and blunders. Often Freeman, in the summation at the end of chapters or in footnotes, gives this additional information; but at times he so orders it that the reader finds himself wandering in a fog of his own which borders on obscurity.

But the method is a valuable and permanent contribution to military biography, a contribution which must greatly improve it. It is most successful in Scott's march on Mexico City, for here Lee is not a commander but an officer of the staff, operating for the most part on detached reconnaissance duty. The approach, therefore, to any situation is concrete and personal: Lee performing in dangerous positions, making hazardous scouts; or sustaining terrific hardships, such as crossing the *pedregal* in foul weather, on a black night, to carry information that would help assure victory. During this entire campaign he proved the perfect

subordinate, and the thorough way in which his part is displayed serves as a fine introduction to him in the familiar role as commander of the Army of Northern Virginia.

Freeman keeps in mind this very fact, and while the description of the advance on Mexico City is one of the best things in the book, remaining with the reader as the equal to the best which follows, he is not allowed to forget that Mexico was the laboratory where Lee learned the rules of combat. For there he studied and was later to adopt Scott's theory of high command. The commanding general's function, according to Scott, is to plan the general operation, acquaint the corps commanders with the plan, and see that their troops are brought to the proper places at the proper time. Here his duties cease. After a battle is joined, it is not the commander's function to fight it in detail. Since the too rigid practice of this theory has been considered as Lee's greatest fault as a general, the Mexican War was destined to have a profound influence upon the American concept of society.

But his military education did not end with this. It was advanced by six other lessons: (1) audacity; (2) the value of working with a trained staff; (3) the relation of careful reconnaissance to sound strategy; (4) the advantage of flanking movements; (5) the relation of communications to strategy—how an army, as Scott's did, may abandon its line of supply and live off the country; (6) the value of fortification, an art very little developed at that time in open warfare. In addition to these things, he saw the necessity for the commander to remain on good terms with his lieutenants. Scott's quarrels with his division heads, after the entry into Mexico City, almost wrecked the army. This example became such a warning to Lee that he went to the other extreme, often to the detriment of the cause. To sum up—at the close of hostilities Lee had observed an army under all conditions but that of retreat. A practical knowledge of cavalry and tactics were also missing from his military education. These lessons had to wait for more desperate days.

It has been the common belief that his genius was constant from beginning to end; that his powers were at times intuitive, if not actually metaphysical. The memoirs of one of his staff officers state as much. But another school, arguing from doctrinaire rules

of war, misunderstanding the special nature of the American issue, has accused him of rashness. The peculiar value of Freeman's narrative lies in its demonstration of Lee's growth as a soldier, in its insight into, and instruction with regard to, the obstacles and limitations imposed upon his decisions at every vital moment of maneuver and battle, from the time he is charged with the mobilization of the Virginia forces to the bitter resolution to surrender his army. Always he was forced to take the second-best way of doing things, either because of the failure of the commissary, when a well-fed and well-equipped army might have made victories decisive; or because of the lack of forage for his animals; or because of the sloth and incapacity of his officers, even their insubordination (Longstreet at Gettysburg; Field in the wilderness); or because of more general situations having to do with the nature of the general defense.

We watch through the four years of war his great mind work: the cohesion of intellect, character, and physical endurance, united by a sensibility which gives to every thought and action a common genesis. We watch it analyzing intelligence reports until the purpose of the enemy seems clear. And once he has made up his mind the decision for action is quick and irrevocable. If it is to maneuver, the orders he gives for marching are clear and specific. This quality of his orders and not the speed of the march moved his brigades to the proper place at the proper time, just as the order to engage rested upon a confident synthesis of all the elements which denied any alternative. It was this functioning of a complete man of great power which justified the confidence of his army and turned it into a fighting machine; which warranted a boldness that in lesser men would have been mere rashness; which turned the blunders or inadequacies of his subordinates into Confederate victories; and which helps, finally, explain the ultimate defeat of the man and the cause he defended so well—for the flaw in the character of a person of such near-perfection must be commensurate with his virtues.

In reading military history it is very hard to find a writer who understands how campaigning, losses in battle, and other causes are continually operating to change the nature of an army. But in this quality of narrative Freeman excels. The variable temper of the Army of Northern Virginia, influencing Lee and influenced

by him, is handled in the most thorough way, until its special character before every battle helps define the outcome. For example, during the Seven Days the army was a loose agglomeration of regiments, at best six semi-independent commands, ordered upon faulty maps, and under the control of a leader who had taken charge after the campaign was under way. These particular movements of troops are the most difficult of the war to clarify and bring alive; yet it is here that the author's technique proves most successful. In the narrative proper, in footnotes and appendices, he sets forth step by step why Lee failed to crush McClellan, although he was able to bring relief to Richmond. Never once was his grand strategy realized tactically. Always each battle was fought by a part of the army with excessive loss because the turning movements never reached the desired point at the desired time. Freeman sets forth the probable reasons in a clear argument, and he is always careful to withhold a positive judgment when the nature of the evidence is conflicting.

After this campaign Lee welded the divisions into effective combat units. The men had already shown their superior fighting abilities; but for the most part the general officers, with certain exceptions, displayed serious shortcomings. With a fine union of decision and tact—he had already won the confidence of all arms—Lee quickly undertook its reorganization. Very quietly he shelved the incompetent generals and, so gradually that it was not noticed, shifted troops from those officers who had not distinguished themselves to more skillful commanders. Building up the staff, he combined the divisions into two corps, making the army's efficiency depend upon three men: Longstreet, Jackson, and Stuart. This was the reorganization which would make both Lee and his army famous—Jackson, the combat wing; Longstreet, the support; and Stuart, the intelligence.

Having once taken their measure, he would plan his marches and battles upon his knowledge of their joint capacity; and the soundness of his judgment was always borne out by their actions. Stuart never brought him a piece of false information; Longstreet, until circumstances called upon him to play a part for which he was unsuited, once he got into action, slow though he was, showed superb tactical sense. It was not by accident that Lee pitched his tent near this general's headquarters. And Jackson, the

spearhead of the army, was the perfect instrument to carry out his chief's daring resolutions. From the beginning there was a perfect understanding between the two men. Lee's orders to Jackson were terse and professional. He knew there was no need for the diplomatic approach which he used with certain of his citizen generals. Jackson often disagreed about plans; but if he was overruled, he would make Lee's plan his own and carry it out as he alone could do it. He is reported as saying after the Seven Days that he would follow Lee blindfolded, which has a curious corollary, for Lee at that time seems to have doubted Jackson's willingness to serve under another. Lee, daring in conception; Jackson, daring and deadly in execution . . . from such a marriage of genius sprang the triumphs of Second Manassas, Sharpsburg, Fredericksburg, and the supreme trial of their spiritual union, Chancellorsville. The most stirring scene in the four long books is their last conference together, when Lee decides to divide his small army (Longstreet's corps is absent) and send Jackson with a force around Hooker's flank. It is the only way by which the Confederates may retain the offensive. "What do you propose to make this movement with?" asked Lee. "With my whole corps," answered Jackson. This was Jackson's own conception, writes Freeman; his major contribution to the campaign. He would not attempt a simple turning movement that would leave an opening for a general assault. Lee had not expected this, for it would leave him only two divisions to face an enemy who might easily have 50,000 men in his front. Boldness matched boldness. He replied calmly, "Go on." "Such an executive officer," said Lee some days after he had watched Jackson disappear into the forest for the last time, "the sun never shone on. I have but to show him my design, and I know that if it can be done, it will be done. No need for me to send or watch him. Straight as the needle to the pole he advanced to the execution of my purpose."

The time from the Seven Days through Chancellorsville marks the great period of Lee's generalship and the army's highest performance; and it was Jackson who was the qualifying element. After his death the nature of the army changed and Lee's generalship was modified. Before, when the army had to undergo reorganization, the refitting and substitutions took place accord-

ing to the structure assumed after the Seven Days. And the test of this structure was Sharpsburg. On that field the army showed it could stand on the defensive, and Lee showed he could handle troops in actual combat. In the stress of the battle there he was forced to direct the tactical dispositions, and they were done so well that every movement was exactly timed to meet the emergency, just as, strategically, the divisions reunited on the field in time to prevent disaster. The one criticism Freeman makes of Lee is of his failure to estimate the fatigue of the army after Second Manassas. Straggling on the way to Maryland had sadly reduced its strength. But Lee had come a long way from his first battle. He no longer attempted grand movements. He satisfied himself with simple flank attacks and quick marches to the rear; and he had become a master at patching up the combat units after the battle's damage. At no time until the end of the war was the morale of the army so low as after Sharpsburg; yet by careful rebuilding, rest, food, and refitting, it was brought to the high efficiency of Fredericksburg, the Confederacy's high noon, and Chancellorsville, the beginning of the decline.

When Lee heard of Jackson's fall, his calm face was overcast with anguish; and his voice choked with emotion as he dictated a reply to that soldier's message, telling him the victory was his. When it was learned that the doctor had given up hope, Lee knelt in prayer and, as Freeman says, went down spiritually to the brook of Jabbok and, like Jacob, wrestled with the angel." He would not believe that Jackson would die, and who can say that his refusal to accept the inevitable was not a dread of ultimate defeat as well as personal grief, for no one knew better than Lee that Jackson's place would not be filled. Freeman closes the second book with the following paragraph. It is worth quoting, as its splendid prose brings to an end his brilliant handling of the army's first phase—"There was a stir outside the tent, a moment of hesitation, and then some one brought in a bit of folded paper. It contained the brief and dreadful news. In the little cottage at Guiney's, Jackson had roused from his restless sleep and had struggled to speak. His mind had been wandering far—who knows how far?—but with an effort, in his even, low voice, he had said: 'Let us pass over the river, and rest under the shade of the trees.' And then, as so often on marches into the unknown, he

had led the way." As Lee read the note, in his distress he too must have asked that same question—who now would lead the way?

He answered it by dividing the Second Corps into two segments, placing Ewell over the reduced Second, and Hill over a new Third Corps. The entire reorganization of the army was the most drastic ever undertaken; and although Lee did the best he could in the exigencies of the war (Confederate fortunes in the west were desperate), Freeman states that the army was back where it had been before the Seven Days. What it could do without Jackson was unknown. But the Pennsylvania campaign must be undertaken with the least delay to relieve the pressure on Vicksburg, before the officers and men would be able to accustom themselves to their new relationships. There were two untried corps commanders, the character of one of these, Ewell, being unknown to Lee; a third of the divisions under new leaders; one corps with two new divisions; seven freshly promoted brigadiers; six infantry brigades commander by senior colonels; a third of the cavalry directed by officers who had not previously served with the army; and the most experienced corps commander, Longstreet, inflated with self-importance and believing he controlled his commander's mind. There was, to offset these disadvantages, the high morale of the troops; and there was Lee. But even Lee without Jackson was an unknown quantity. It was the fate of the Confederacy that such conditions prevailed in the Army of Northern Virginia on the eve of its most critical battle. The reorganization after Chancellorsville, states Freeman, explains Gettysburg.

Gettysburg was a Confederate reverse because Lee failed, as at the Seven Days, to get any coordination in his attacks. On the first day Ewell failed to rise to his new responsibility. The discretion Lee always gave his corps commanders confused Ewell, who had been accustomed to Jackson's explicit orders. But equally, Lee failed to adjust his habits to get the best out of Ewell; therefore, the success on the first day was only partial. When it became apparent that Ewell would do no more, Lee's military sense told him his line ought to be shortened by drawing in on Seminary ridge; but when Ewell protested, he surrendered his judgment and acquiesced in the fishhook formation. Freeman condones this decision, but Lee violated his own theory of the

commander's function. It is the general's duty to make the plan, the subordinate's to carry it out. On the second day things drifted badly. Lee gave only one positive order, and that was to Longstreet to attack at eleven o'clock. He did not stay to see it executed, although he was fully aware of his most capable lieutenant's sullen behavior, his passive resistance to the offensive, which was Lee's announced plan of action. Freeman goes so far as to say that the army was without a commander on the second day. On the third day it was the same thing, except that Longstreet became openly insubordinate. Stuart's absence partly exonerates Lee for his lack of control, for he was in the dark as to the enemy's strength and position; and under such circumstances his action could not have the drive which accurate information would have given it; but it does not completely excuse him, and he did not ask to be excused for his failure, once he had settled on a plan, to have it executed. Freeman lays the principal blame upon Longstreet;² but finally, Lee cannot be absolved. There is a difference between leaving the tactical management to the corps commander when he is obedient and when he is insubordinate. It was Lee's plain duty to force Longstreet to obey him, or to turn the corps over to somebody who would. Freeman concludes that Lee had to put up with his subordinate's behaviour, because he was his most skilled commander; but, as it turned out, Longstreet did no actual commanding. He merely stood in the way to block whatever chance there was of success for Pickett's thrust. The author further explains Lee's action on the grounds of his overconfidence in the butternut ranks. This may partly interpret the reasons, but it does not excuse his violation on those three days of his conception of the commander's business: he failed to get the troops into position at the proper time; he allowed his subordinates to interfere with his plan of battle; and he failed to see that the battle was joined when ordered.

Afterwards, in the Wilderness, in the shifts to the right at Cold Harbor, and finally, in the trenches at Petersburg, Lee showed that he had found out what a change Jackson's death had wrought in the army. More and more he assumed direct responsibility. It took the battle of Gettysburg to make him aware of

² Recent opinion presents Longstreet in a better light. However, the most recent word is not necessarily the last word.

what he must expect of himself under the new conditions. It was the South's misfortune that it had to be that particular battle, for afterwards his power was seen at its fullest. And Freeman's treatment retains its convincing analysis of the army's defensive operations. He dismisses Longstreet's contention that, saving his wound, he would have pushed his advantage in the Wilderness flank attack to victory, by demonstrating that the enemy had been pushed as far as circumstances allowed when the bullet struck. When Grant finally slipped to the south of the James, the author defends Lee's surprise by showing in detail how little exact information Beauregard furnished, and how Lee's care and prudence did not allow him to move until he was sure of the enemy's intentions.

In the preface and in the short summation at the end the author states that there is nothing in Lee's life to interpret. We are told that he was a simple Christian gentleman. That he was a Christian gentleman of the old school, the most disputatious would not deny; but that he was a simple man seems far from the truth. An action may be simple and direct but have the most complex implications. Lee's code was strict. It extended into all his relationships, his duty to himself, to his family, to the army, to the Confederacy and its civil authority. It was complete as no code can be today. But this completeness does not prohibit the necessity for interpretation. Indeed, every author, whether he recognizes it or not, interprets his protagonist by writing about him. The arrangement of his material, his constant selection and analysis, form opinion as assuredly by implication as by statement. The failure to recognize this is to make a specific interpretation often masquerade as something else.

This, perhaps, has led the author to ignore the full relationship between two phases of Lee's conduct: his dealings with the civil authority and his attitude after Appomattox. The first is important because it bound Lee's army to a fixed object, Richmond. The defense of Richmond should have been a secondary object. The aim of the war was to bring about Southern independence. Lee is excused on the ground of his belief in the subordination of the military to the civil government. In a recognized nation this is a sound attitude; but, actually, since the Confederacy assumed the role of revolution, there was no civil authority until it had been

established by the armies in the field. Lee's relationship, therefore, could not be to the civil authorities of a revolutionary government what it had been to the old United States. Did Lee recognize this changed relation? If he did not, was he not unfit for the fullest performance of the greatest military leader of a revolution? The consideration of this matter cannot be dismissed in the definitive life of the gentleman. To state, as the author does, that Lee felt the military must subordinate itself to the civil, in the light of the situation, begs the question. His model, Washington, certainly did not view the question in the same light.

Most of the last book is taken up with the final, what some may consider the significant, phase in this great man's life. But the treatment here does not match the skill with which the war period has been handled. It is diffuse and uncertain. It accumulates fresh incidents; it goes into great detail about the management of Washington College; it treats extensively the changing curriculum and the growing endowment of the college; it takes Lee to the springs, on visits to his kin and admirers. Lee in all this activity has been interpreted as the guide to Southern salvation. This salvation is to be achieved by building up the character of Southern youth; by accepting the decision of battle through the faithful adherence to the terms of surrender with the hope that, by the mercy of God, things will come all right in the end. This is a valid interpretation—it has been the common one—but it is inadequate. The mercy of God did not bring independence. Nor was the war over. One phase of it was done, but the old wounds were kept open by the Reconstruction policy and the worst form of guerilla warfare. The avowed purpose of this policy, which broke the terms at Appomattox and Goldsboro, was the destruction of Southern civilization. Did Lee not see that the training of a few thousand students at Washington College was a futile thing, if their civilization was to be wrecked? And what was submission but the worst form of slavery? Fortunately the leadership changed to the middle South, to those who led the Ku Klux Klan, that society which made survival possible. If Lee did not understand the implications of the policy of the Northern radicals, who were the government, his nobility conceals a serious flaw.

It is just this attitude of Lee during the days of peace that needs interpretation, and it is the lack of interpretation in the present biography that fails to explain his acceptance of personal defeat. It is hard to believe, as Freeman would have us, that this acceptance was passive. His "I had rather face a thousand deaths than meet General Grant"; the furious pacing under the apple tree after surrender; the partial withdrawal from life; the refusal to discuss the battles; his distrust of politicians; the coldness his old officers noticed on occasion; his simple statement to Captain White on one of their rides, *apropos* of nothing, that if Jackson had been at Gettysburg, he would have won the battle; his rapid transition from maturity to old age—do not all these things point to a terrific struggle to maintain his mask? Do they not show that resignation was not in his heart? All the time he must have been fighting again the battles and questioning his actions. And must he not have tried to find the answer to his failure in a comparison of his career with that of his father—careers so different but both ending in defeat? Must he not have asked himself how virtue can fail or did he know how the noble man may be pursued by Fate and overthrown? Or did the flaw lie deeper, somewhere behind that irreproachable mask, in the refusal to demean his personal code to save the cause?

These questions are not proposed in this work; but they must be considered before the biography of Lee can be said, in all respects, to be definitive.



ANDREW LYITLE is the distinguished editor of the *Sewanee Review* and is lecturer in English and creative writing at the University of the South (Sewanee). One of the twelve Southerners who contributed to the Agrarian manifesto, *I'll Take My Stand*, in 1930, he appeared in a second Agrarian symposium, *Who Owns America?* Among his published works are several anthologies, a collection of fiction, five novels, including *The Velvet Horn* (1957), a historical work on Nathan Bedford Forrest, and numerous critical essays. He has twice received Guggenheim Fellowships in creative writing.

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